UNIVERSAL LIBRARY
133 099
UNIVERSAL LIBRARY

Mr. Littlejohn

PLAYS BY MR. FLAVIN

CHILDREN OF THE MOON
LADY OF THE ROSE
SERVICE FOR TWO
THE CRIMINAL CODE
BROKEN DISHES
CROSS ROADS
DANCING DAYS
AMACO
ACHILLES HAD A HEEL
TAPESTRY IN GRAY
AROUND THE CORNER
BLUE JEANS

SPINDRIFT

ONE ACT PLAYS

BRAINS
CASUALTIES
THE BLIND MAN
AN EMERGENCY CASE
A QUESTION OF PRINCIPLE
CALEB STONE'S DEATH WATCH

Mr. Littlejohn

by

MARTIN FLAVIN

HARPER & BROTHERS *Publishers*
NEW YORK *and* LONDON

MR. LITTLEJOHN

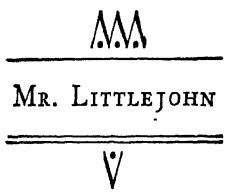
Copyright, 1940, by Martin Flavin
Printed in the United States of America
All rights in this book are reserved. It may not be used for dramatic, motion- or talking-picture purposes without written authorization from the holder of these rights. Nor may the book or part thereof be reproduced in any manner whatsoever without permission in writing except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information address: Harper & Brothers, 49 East 33rd Street, New York, N. Y.

10-O

FIRST EDITION

TO

SALLY



Mr. Littlejohn

1

IT WAS A FINE, MILD OCTOBER DAY IN 1937, but a very trying one for Horatio Littlejohn, president of Rosydent Inc., producer of those celebrated aids to health and beauty, viz., Rosydent Tooth Paste ("Save the surface and nature will do the rest"), Rosydent Mouth Wash ("A breath like new-mown hay"), and Rosydent Hair Tonic ("A hair on the head is worth two on the collar").

In the morning, from his olive-wood office in the executive building of the mammoth plant in Newark, he had talked over the phone with Mr. Weatherbee, associate counsel for Rosydent in Washington, D. C. Mr. Weatherbee said:

"Well, it looks like they have got us out on a limb and are going to put the screws on."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn and reached for a soda bicarb tablet which was handy on the desk.

"If Hemlock could get this Treasury tax evasion suit out of the way," continued Mr. Weatherbee, "we might wriggle you out of a Senatorial investigation."

Mr. Littlejohn munched the soda tablet and said nothing.

"The fact is," Mr. Weatherbee went on cheerfully, "Rosydent is in bad with the administration and the public too on account of your alleged violation of the Wagner Act, and it's just good politics to wham it."

"What do you advise?" inquired Mr. Littlejohn.

"Caution," replied Mr. Weatherbee, and after a long silence he repeated, "Caution."

At this moment Mr. Mooney, the plant manager, came into

the office and said that a gang in the hair tonic unit had pulled the fuses and sat down, and he added in a choking voice:

"The sons of bitches—the sons of bitches . . . I beg your pardon, Mr. Littlejohn." He sank into a chair and mopped his forehead.

Mr. Littlejohn hung up the phone in the midst of something Mr. Weatherbee was saying.

There was now a great commotion in the street, and a stone shattered the glass in the window and came to rest on the desk.

"It's the police," said Mr. Mooney. "They're clearing the street."

"Ah—" said Mr. Littlejohn and nodded vaguely.

Miss Muffet, his secretary, opened the door. She was pale but calm.

"There are six men here from the Treasury Department," she said. "They wish to examine the books."

"Let them," said Mr. Littlejohn.

At this point Mr. Harrison Hemlock of Hemlock, Hemlock & Hemlock, general counsel for Rosydent, called up to say that the conference with the C.I.O. would be continued at two o'clock.

"We must be firm," he said.

When things had quieted down in the street Miss Muffet brought Mr. Littlejohn his lunch which consisted of a glass of milk and a lettuce leaf between two thin slices of whole-wheat bread. Afterwards he had a level teaspoon of soda in warm water. Still, he felt far from well.

At two o'clock he entered the conference room where a committee of striking tooth-paste employees was already assembled.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen," he said.

Some of them tittered and one made a noise like a cat. Mr. Littlejohn felt something rising in him and knew it was his blood pressure. He thought, I must be careful, very careful. Dr. Schwartzkopf had warned him to avoid excitement, and he

felt for the amyl nitrite ampoules which he had been advised to carry in his pocket. He sat down in his big chair at the head of the long table with Mr. Mooney at his left and Mr. Hemlock at his right. He had a letter in his hand which he had not yet opened.

The discussion, which had been in progress for three weeks, went on from where it had left off the day before. Mr. Morris Fishkin, counsel for the T.P. (tooth paste) Division of the C.I.O., had the floor. He was a cocky young man with a nasty disposition, and Mr. Littlejohn thoroughly disliked him.

"Now on the question of shower heads," snapped Mr. Fishkin, "we insist on not less than five heads to fifteen employees or three employees to a shower. We contend that the worker, at the end of his day of toil, has a right to be promptly and efficiently cleansed."

Mr. Mooney snorted disdainfully and Mr. Hemlock shook his head at him. Mr. Littlejohn opened the letter which was from the superintendent of his dairy farm near Watertown. Mrs. Littlejohn had bought the farm which had been a great trial and expense. He had no interest in cows and the whole thing was distasteful to him. The letter said:

Dear sir:

I cannot get anybody up here to build fence though it is in bad shape and on the 160 acre north piece a lot of posts is rotted out completely and King Sam the red bull got cut badly in loose wire last week. Kindly advise what I should do because these people up here would sooner be on relief and sit on their tails for 3 dollars a day than stand up and work for 5.

Yours Resp.
James Turner

Mr. Littlejohn read the letter several times and particularly studied the phrase "sit on their tails" which was new to him; it seemed expressive but perhaps a little disrespectful and undignified. He sighed.

In the meantime the discussion had veered from shower heads to toilet seats. Mr. Fishkin still had the floor.

"The health of the worker is paramount, not only to himself but to his employer. Calls of nature delayed or unresponded to result in grave physical disorders. I have here—" and he slammed a brief case on the table, "a file of medical statistics. We demand sixteen toilet seats for every hundred employees."

"Sweet Christ!" exclaimed Mr. Mooney leaping to his feet. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Littlejohn, but ——"

"Mr. Mooney, if you please—" protested Mr. Hemlock. But Mr. Mooney, who was a fighting Irishman, was not to be suppressed.

"No, by God," he shouted, "this is too damn much. What kind of bowels have these birds got? I'd sooner see the plant closed up than running on a dose of salts. Mr. Littlejohn," and he modified his manner and his voice, "excuse me for my language, but I feel we've got to take a stand right here."

Mr. Hemlock was on his feet with arms outstretched. "Gentlemen, gentlemen," he pleaded, "really we must preserve ——"

But Fishkin, who was afraid of Mr. Mooney but not of Mr. Littlejohn, was quick to seize an advantage thrust into his hands.

"One moment, Hemlock," he snarled, "let's find out what *he* thinks." And he advanced on Mr. Littlejohn and even shook his finger in his face. "Can you look me in the eye and honestly state it to be your belief that sixteen toilet seats are too many?"

There was a moment of dead silence. Mr. Hemlock moved uneasily, like a tiger ready to spring into the breach. Mr. Mooney clenched his fists and glowered. The strikers leaned forward in their chairs. Mr. Littlejohn moistened his dry lips.

"I think—" he began mildly, and hesitated. "I think it is, er, very—very—" and he stopped.

"Very what?" snapped Fishkin.

"Very un-American," Mr. Littlejohn said firmly.

"Un-American!" shouted Fishkin. "So you think it's un-American for one hundred workers to have sixteen toilet seats?" Mr. Littlejohn rose to his full height of five feet five and stood beside his chair. "Do you or do you not?"

"I will not discuss this matter." Mr. Littlejohn spoke calmly but his mouth was very dry.

"Oh, you won't discuss it, eh?"

"No, sir, I will not." There was such menace in his eye that Fishkin actually drew back. "And permit me, sir, to add that I consider these whole proceedings un-American—very un-American."

"And what do you know about America?" sneered Fishkin who had never been west of Philadelphia in his life. Hemlock hurled an objection but Fishkin went right on. "I repeat, sir, who are you to say what is un-American? With your heritage of wealth and ease and comfort! With personal private toilet seats for your own exclusive use! Sitting on your tail in affluence and luxury!"

Mr. Littlejohn shuddered and drew back, and the pulses in his temples throbbed as the pressure in his arteries mounted. He thought, I must be careful, very careful. And he said with trembling dignity:

"This is not a personal matter— I deeply regret, er . . . Excuse me, gentlemen— Good afternoon." And he walked out of the room and down the long corridor which led to his office. And as he walked he took from his pocket an ampoule which contained 5 minims of amyl nitrite, crushed it in his handkerchief, and sniffed it cautiously. Immediately the throbbing in his temples stopped and he could feel the pressure coming down like mercury in a tube.

"I must get out of here," he said, and was startled by the phrase; he had never put the thing in words before. He walked on slowly, pondering. Was 'un-American' the proper word, the thing he meant to say?—And if not that, then what?—The whole thing was an enigma—not the toilet seats of course, but something much, much bigger which was everywhere behind them, the vague and distant source. And how could you find the answer till you could state the problem?—

"Yes, *fun.* And if it isn't fun—*what is it?*"

"It's hell," said Patrick bitterly. And how could life be fun in a capitalistic system?—except for a handful of economic royalists, bone-crushing pirates who sat astraddle of the world and ground their fellow men into the dust! He tried to curl his lip but it was cut and swollen. Fun? He should say it wasn't. But life *could* be fun. Look at Russia!

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn.

Patrick hedged a little. Perhaps not at the moment. One couldn't turn the whole world upside down and get everything adjusted overnight. That was too much to expect. The capitalistic countries and their stinking bourgeoisie were causing all the trouble and delay. But the period of *fun* might begin at any instant. It was just around the corner.

Mr. Littlejohn could not repress a shudder at this phrase which revived unpleasant memories.

"Yes," thundered Patrick, banging the table with his fist, "life *can* be fun—when social barriers are leveled to the ground, when the ruling class is liquidated, when we have a universal five-year plan."

"I—I wonder—" murmured Mr. Littlejohn.

"That's the trouble with your kind. You wonder all your lives and never have the guts to take a step. Hoarding up your pennies, hanging on the coat tails of the rich, waiting for the day when you'll be big shots too like Horatio Littlejohn——"

"Oh, no—" gasped Mr. Littlejohn.

But Patrick cut him short. "Sure. I know your kind—the petty bourgeois riffraff of the system. No ideology, no solidarity, no brains or guts. Well, let me tell you something: you're just another sucker on a treadmill." Mr. Littlejohn moved uncomfortably. "That hits a soft spot, eh?" He pulled a dog-eared pamphlet from his pocket and flung it on the table. "Read that and get the low-down on yourself!"

A frowzy looking woman in a dirty dressing gown came in from the kitchen. She said ungraciously that they would have

crowd of demonstrating strikers. Mr. Littlejohn was recognized and there were hoots and jeers and a few halfhearted rocks.

"Nuts to you!" yelled the driver and thumbed his nose.

Mr. Littlejohn was startled. Andrew, his colored chauffeur, never spoke unless he asked a question.

"A lot of goddamn trouble-making foreigners," the driver said. He spoke with quite an accent. "If they don't like America why the hell don't they stay out of it?—Them guys don't want to work. They'd sooner sit on their tails and squawk."

Mr. Littlejohn winced and closed his eyes. They came to the Pulaski Skyway. The driver lighted a Camel and offered one to his passenger. Mr. Littlejohn declined. They roared into the tunnel.

"Turn that knob, brother," said the driver, "and we'll get the latest news."

Mr. Littlejohn turned on the radio. The news was mostly about the exploits of Black Beard, Public Enemy No. 1 of the moment. This renowned bandit had just robbed a bank in a small town in Idaho, killed two men and wounded several others, and escaped from the scene with his booty. A company of G men were reported to be in close pursuit. There was a $25,000 reward for Black Beard dead or alive.

"There is a guy for you," said the driver.

"Why?" said Mr. Littlejohn.

"Does he sit on his tail and squawk?—He does not— One day he pulls a job in Oregon. Next week he's down in Texas— A guy learns stuff traveling round like that."

"Ah—" said Mr. Littlejohn. They skirted the Grand Central and emerged into Park Avenue.

"What the hell do we know about life?" said the driver. And after a moment he continued sadly, "We're just cogs in a machine."

"Still, I should think," ventured Mr. Littlejohn, "that riding about in a taxi as you do . . ."

"Naw!" the driver shook his head. "This ain't *life*."

"You think not?" Mr. Littlejohn leaned forward anxiously.

"Well, if it is," the driver said and paused to emphasize his words, "from where I sit—it stinks."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. They entered 69th Street and stopped before the door.

"I have enjoyed my trip," Mr. Littlejohn said.

"You and me both, brother," the driver replied.

Mr. Littlejohn shook hands with him and ascended the steps of the house in which, fifty-five years ago, he had been born. It was a quarter past four.

The butler opened the door. He looked surprised and displeased to see Mr. Littlejohn at this unusual hour, however he took his hat and coat.

Mr. Littlejohn walked down the hall and opened the door of the library. There was a fire on the hearth and the twins were sprawled in easy chairs in front of it. Punch was reading the *New Yorker* and Judy was just sitting. It was still a little early for a cocktail.

"Good evening—" murmured Mr. Littlejohn.

They looked up and smiled but did not speak. They seldom spoke and almost never in the family circle.

Mr. Littlejohn backed away. As he went into the hall he said, or seemed to say, for his voice was somewhat muffled:

"Squatting on their tails—" And the door closed rather sharply.

After a moment Punch looked at Judy over the top of the *New Yorker*, and at the same moment Judy looked at him.

"It couldn't have been," said Punch.

"Do you think we ought to see?" said Judy.

Punch thought about this for so long that he forgot the whole matter. After a while they went over to the Plaza for a cocktail.

Mr. Littlejohn climbed the stairs and went into the sitting room. There was another cheerful fire in this room and Mrs.

Littlejohn was sitting near it. She was reading a book by Ernest Hemingway called *To Have and Have Not* and her nose was so deep in the volume that she would not have heard the voice of God. It was a fascinating, powerful, compelling, titillating book with frequent allusions to things that Mrs. Littlejohn was not quite sure about. It had her standing on her head.

"Good evening—" said Mr. Littlejohn.

Mrs. Littlejohn had afterwards a vague impression that someone had come in and asked a question, but she could not be quite sure because it was at the moment that the wounded Cuban had sat up on the locker and plugged Harry Morgan in the belly. It was terrific stuff and Mrs. Littlejohn, who was inclined to acidity when under tension, was rumbling like a box car. She was a plain, dull woman without a sense of humor.

Mr. Littlejohn withdrew. He crossed the hall to his own room, locked the door, sat down on a modern chair in the middle of the floor, and stared gloomily at the wallpaper. It was modern wallpaper with crazy geometric figures scattered over it. It did not mean anything at all. The old wallpaper had had cupids in it and they had meant something. Nothing in the room meant anything. Mrs. Littlejohn had had it all done over during the week that he was in the hospital under observation. When he came home it was like going to the Waldorf. He sighed.

He thought about the twins. He had loved them so when they were little things. When they were twelve they had gone away to school and, so far as he was concerned, they had never come back. They were twenty-two now. He did not know what they thought or felt. A tear trickled down his nose.

The telephone began to ring. It was his personal phone and no one knew the number except Hemlock and Miss Muffet. It rang and rang and rang. After a while he tore it off the wall and threw it in the wastebasket. This shot his blood pressure up about fifty points and he took another whiff of amyl nitrite.

He sat down again facing a portrait of his father, the late

Commodore Littlejohn, founder of Rosydent. The portrait had a disapproving air. The Commodore had been a hard, stern man. He had always known what to do about everything. Not only had he known what to do himself, but he had known what everybody else should do, and they had done it. He, Horatio Littlejohn, had done it too.

He took off one shoe—it was his custom to change for dinner—and hurled it at the Commodore. It smashed the glass and left a deep scar on the Commodore's grim jaw but it did not alter the disapproval in the old man's eyes.

Mr. Littlejohn felt slightly shocked. He addressed the portrait with an air of mild conciliation.

"Things have changed, father," he said and paused abruptly—*What things?*—And if you didn't know, why assume that they had changed?—No, it wasn't as easy as all that— He changed the subject and continued rather lamely, "I never wanted to go into the business anyway— Still, it might have been the same with anything." He took off his clothing and scattered it about. "Here I am at fifty-five—with *what?*" And he came in his B.V.D.'s, a pudgy, round-faced, little man, and stood beneath the portrait looking up into its face.

"For thirty-five years I have been trying to do something but I have no notion what. I have led an honorable and decent life, or anyway I think I have, but I have no more freedom than a galley slave. My employees call me a heartless tyrant, and the government says I am an economic royalist by which they mean, a rascal. I don't know what I am." He sighed and rubbed his bald head thoughtfully.

"My hair has fallen out." And he sighed again as he thought of the battles he had had with Mr. Gladwish, his public relations counsel, on this very point. Mr. Gladwish had respectfully insisted that he conceal his nakedness with a toupee. "For," he argued, not unsoundly, "how can we maintain the virtues of our hair tonic with such a skeleton in our family closet?" But Mr. Littlejohn had been adamant. He would not wear a toupee

or indulge in any other subterfuge, and he would not test the virtues of the hair tonic. "For," he contended, "if it should fail to grow hair on my head . . . mind, I don't say it would, but, *if* it did—it would leave me without a leg to stand on—No, no, Mr. Gladwish, my head is a personal matter which does not involve the public." It had been a stormy session. Mr. Gladwish had resigned but had later reconsidered his decision.

"My digestion is bad and my blood pressure is high," continued Mr. Littlejohn with his eyes upon the Commodore. "My children have grown up with every possible advantage. They rarely speak to me and instinctively avoid my company. My wife—" and he glanced at his narrow, modern bed. "My wife is a good woman, I suppose, but—well, it is not—exciting." He paced the floor.

"I have this house where I was born, and another one in Florida, and a dairy farm in Watertown. I don't know why. And there is always something wrong with one of them. And they are hung around my neck. There is no way to get rid of them." He began to get excited.

"There is no way to get rid of anything. I've been running on a treadmill all my life, but it's just an endless belt. You run and run and run until you're out of breath and worn out and old, but you don't go anywhere." He paused for breath. His voice was trembling with emotion.

"*You* had the Methodist Church, but what have I got, father?"

The portrait did not bat an eye, and after a moment Mr. Littlejohn turned it with its face to the wall. This simple action was destined, later on, to puzzle the authorities.

The butler knocked on the door and said that he would lay out Mr. Littlejohn's dinner clothes and put the buttons in his shirt. Mr. Littlejohn told him not to mind and the butler went away. The butler was afterwards sharply cross-examined on this point. He maintained that he had not seen his employer

who spoke to him through the door, and that he had noticed nothing unusual in his voice.

Mr. Littlejohn sat down again in the middle of the room.

"I must find out," he said, and was startled at the words which seemed to come unbidden from his lips— Find out?— But what?

He phrased the answer slowly. "Why, the nature of this thing called human life, and what it is about—if anything at all, and if not—well, one should know it and be settled with the matter." Yes, that was it exactly— He nodded to himself and then he frowned. But how to go about it was the question. He might endow something: The Littlejohn Foundation to unravel the enigma of his life and of human life in general— No, that wouldn't help— The doctors would go at it with microscopes and telescopes, and take it all apart, but they wouldn't find the answer— It was something that you had to do yourself— Yes, but how? From the bottom of a well the horizon was cramped; from a treadmill the scenery never changed— If only he were free to examine life himself—like that bold and daring Black Beard—in Idaho today and in Texas the next week . . .

"I must get out of here," he said aloud.

Suddenly he jumped out of his chair, rushed across the room, pulled out a dresser drawer, threw out the contents on the floor. Yes, there it was, beneath a pile of shirts he had not worn for years—*a black mustache.*

It was a work of art in the style called "handlebar." Mrs. Littlejohn had had it made years ago by a well-known hairdresser, and had forced him, much against his will, to wear it to a charity masquerade in a freely restored representation of the celebrated highwayman, Dick Turpin. It had been there ever since in the bottom of that drawer.

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. He put on the mustache which was provided with a strong adhesive substance, and surveyed himself in the mirror in his bathroom. He was pleased and

startled. Above the mustache he was still Horatio Littlejohn, but below it was a grim forbidding stranger.

He combed out the ends and turned them up which gave him the air of a cockney bookmaker on a second-rate track. He tried them drooping in the Dundreary style. But he liked them best in their natural walrus fashion. There was a gloomy, fierce, and swaggering quality about them— Yes, he liked this best. A sinister threat beneath the nose and benevolence above it. A happy combination of Simon Legree and Mr. Pickwick.

"Ah—" said Mr. Littlejohn. And as he stood there staring in the glass he could feel his pulses throbbing. The room began to swim and he sat down weakly on the toilet seat, and this reminded him of toilet seats in general, of Fishkin and Hemlock and the Treasury and the Senate, of the C.I.O. and the New Deal.

"Sitting on my tail," he muttered as he gripped the toilet seat with trembling hands. "Treadmill—cog in a machine—galley slave—economic royalist . . ." He could still see his face in the long mirror of the door, and it was not a face to trifle with.

"Sitting on my tail . . ." he repeated bitterly. "No! I'm through. Let someone else sit on it if they like."

Suddenly he felt calm and strong, and even—buoyant. He rose from the toilet seat and went back into his room. There was a little wall safe near the head of his bed. He could not remember the combination but it was a gimcrack thing and he pried it open with a paper knife. He broke the paper knife and tore some plaster off the wall and got fingerprints on everything. These fingerprints were to occupy the attention of the police for a long time.

In the safe was a roll of bills that he had placed there on one of those black days in 1929 when it looked as though anything might happen. Among them were a number of twenty-dollar U. S. Treasury gold certificates which were *yellow and not green*, and which were destined, later on, to complicate his life. But he did not even notice them. He seized the roll and

was about to put it in his pocket when he was dismayed to find that he was still in his B.V.D.'s.

He rushed into his clothes closet and found what he was looking for buried in the back of it. It was a suit which his tailor had made for him some years before when Dr. Schwartzkopf had advised him to take up duck hunting. But he had never taken up duck hunting because first the Depression had come along and then the New Deal on top of it, and he had never had time or felt really well enough. The suit consisted of corduroy trousers, a checkered, double-breasted vest, and a very baggy tweed coat with capacious pockets intended for ducks but equally suitable for pajamas and toilet articles. There was a black twill cap that went with it and which had flaps that could be pulled down over the ears. The tailor, an imaginative man of sedentary habits, had said that the outfit would be appropriate for any outdoor sport.

At ten minutes past six Mr. Littlejohn opened the door of his room and peeked cautiously into the hall. The coast was as clear as a bell. He crept down the stairs and let himself out into the street. It was a fine, mild evening.

"Hum—" he said. "We are under way at last: the Littlejohn Expedition to Examine the Enigma."

As he turned from 69th Street into Fifth Avenue a policeman on the corner looked at him suspiciously. Mr. Littlejohn returned his glance and smiled.

II

MR. LITTLEJOHN GOT ON A BUS MARKED Washington Square. He felt elated and even physically light, like a man who has just let go of a bear's tail. The bus delighted him. He had not been in a bus for many years, and this one was the latest thing in luxury and gadgetry. It furrowed through the traffic like a monstrous mole.

He looked out of the window and watched the crawling stream of cars. Like an ant run, he reflected, and the ants were homeward bound, bumper to bumper, wheel to wheel. The pavements swarmed with them, and there were countless others in subways underground. In the morning they would all crawl back again. Not all, he thought, because in the morning some would be dead, some were making their last trips tonight. But there would be new ones to replace them: boys and girls with hopes and dreams, starting on the endless belt—the treadmill. Up and down, up and down—*for what?*—Well, he would make it his business to find out.

Below 23rd Street the traffic thinned and he felt a twinge of loneliness. He thought of Wall Street abandoned in the dark and shuddered. There was nothing of value to be learned down there. He made a quick decision and alighted at 14th Street which was ablaze with light and thronged with people. Indeed something unusual seemed to be going on.

In a moment he found himself in front of Bodenheim's Big Store in the midst of a crowd of demonstrating strikers. They were marching up and down with banners which read: "Bodenheim is Unfair," "Down with Bodenheim," "Don't trade with

Bodenheim," "The wolf at your door is Bodenheim's." Pickets were standing near the doors exhorting passers-by not to trade with Bodenheim, and a bareheaded man, standing in an open car parked against the curb, was making an impassioned appeal to a circle of apathetic loafers.

"Bodenheim denies us a living wage," he shouted. "Bodenheim doesn't care whether we eat or starve. He is rich. He has lined his purse and fattened his belly from the exploitation of the working man. Down with Bodenheim!"

And the crowd echoed: "Down with Bodenheim!"

At this moment a small man appeared at an open window on the second floor.

"Excuse me, please," he cried out in a high-pitched, quavering voice with a very Jewish accent. "Fellow American citizens——"

There were boos and catcalls.

"My name is Bodenheim——"

"Down with Bodenheim!" chanted the crowd.

"I ask you to kindly give me your attention— For thirty years I have worked like a dog to build this business— Do I look like a scoundrel?"

"Yes," roared the crowd and surged threateningly across the sidewalk. The little man disappeared from the window, and Mr. Littlejohn was shoved this way and that. Someone jabbed him in the back with the handle of a banner and he ran into the store.

There were a few frightened clerks behind the counters and even fewer customers. Mr. Bodenheim hurried to the front to wait on Mr. Littlejohn himself. He shook hands with him and said:

"I thank you for your confidence." His hand was moist and there were beads of perspiration on his forehead.

"Don't mention it," said Mr. Littlejohn and looked around anxiously for something he could buy.

"For thirty years I am in business here," the little man con-

tinued nervously. "I buy as cheap as I can and I sell for as much as I can and I pay all the wages I can." He paused and ran his fingers through his hair with a despairing gesture. "Could you kindly tell me please what people should expect? What is it that they want?"

"No," said Mr. Littlejohn, "I can't, but I suspect . . ." He did not know that he suspected anything and was much surprised to hear his words. "I suspect they may want something else."

"Something else?" Mr. Bodenheim looked scared.

"Something else entirely," Mr. Littlejohn reassured him with a smile. "But—I have no notion what."

He selected a corncob pipe and two packages of Bull Durham tobacco. He had not smoked for two years, under Dr. Schwartzkopf's orders, and he had never smoked a pipe but he saw nothing else that would fit into his pockets. He felt embarrassed at the amount of his purchase and so, on the way out, bought a three-dollar mouth organ with a chromatic scale. Mr. Bodenheim shook hands with him again at the door.

As he came out onto the sidewalk a girl picket stuck out her tongue at him and called him a dirty skunk. The demonstrators were still marching up and down and the man in the open car still shouting.

"Look out! Here come the cops!" somebody yelled. Half the crowd turned one way and half the other. Mr. Littlejohn was caught right in the middle of it. His feet were stepped on, elbows were jammed into his throat, and the breath was quite squeezed out of him. Everybody was shouting now: "The cops! The cops!"

In another moment they had melted away and he found himself almost alone. A woman dropped her banner and he stooped to pick it up. There was a sound like thunder and he turned his head to see what looked like a regiment of horses charging directly at him. He scrambled to his feet and ran as fast as he could run in the opposite direction, reflecting as he fled that

by no greater readjustment than the changing of his coat, he had changed sides in a battle and was fleeing for his life from the traditional guardians of his person. It was certainly a topsy-turvy world, and the only sure way to tell which side you were on was to look over your shoulder and see which crowd was chasing you.

When he could run no further he stopped and leaned against a show window with his forehead pressed against it. It was a mortician's window and there was nothing in it but a large black funeral urn. He was breathless and giddy and his pulses were pounding like trip hammers. He thought, I must be careful—very careful; and he felt in his pocket for an amyl nitrite ampoule, but he had left them home.

The night life of 14th Street was flowing smoothly past him, but he didn't look around. He had a vague idea that perhaps he had been followed, that the long arm of the law might be reaching for him now . . . He was conscious that someone else had stopped at the window and was standing close beside him, but he didn't even look from the corner of his eye. An arm brushed his arm cautiously. He shuddered and drew back. And then he heard a wheedling voice close beside his ear.

"Come home with me, daddy."

He gasped and turned his head and saw, in a kind of blur, a friendly, smiling face.

"*Please* come home with me, daddy," the voice repeated softly.

"Why, er, thank you very much," stammered Mr. Littlejohn, and he murmured something else about lying down a while.

"You're cute," the voice giggled in reply.

No one had called him "cute" for fifty years or more. He smiled halfheartedly.

She slipped her arm through his and led him, unresisting, around the corner into Sixth Avenue. They walked in silence. She had nothing more to say. He stole a glance at her beneath

a street light and thought that she was young and beautiful, but he was still a little dazed. She was neither.

They entered a dark hallway and climbed a flight of stairs. She pushed Mr. Littlejohn before her. Men had been known to break and run. She knew her business and she took no chances. She unlocked a door, switched on a naked light bulb and revealed an ugly, disordered cubicle with an unmade double bed. There was just room for a washstand and a chair. Mr. Littlejohn, who still felt very shaky, hastily sat down.

"You're a cute daddy," she said without enthusiasm, and she kicked off her shoes and unsnapped something at her neck which dropped her dress like the harness of a fire horse. There she stood in mussy step-ins and a pink brassière.

Mr. Littlejohn rose from his chair with a strangled exclamation and backed against the washstand. Memory flashed back: his college days. He had not known a prostitute since then. The tawdry room, the unmade double bed, the naked girl with hard, dull eyes—all just as he remembered it. He had wanted something—pretty, in the fine flush of his youth—something warm and sweet and nice. Well, whatever it might be, it was *nothing* when you bought it. Just the thin edge of a dime was sufficient to destroy it. He had learned that even then, nearly forty years ago.

"Five dollars, daddy, please," she said, holding out her hand. She had once received five dollars from a drunk and for days had barely spoken to acquaintances. It had never happened again but she still clung to the formula.

"But—my dear young lady—" stammered Mr. Littlejohn.

"Okay. Two bucks," she sighed.

"You—you misunderstand me——"

"Say, what the hell!" She fixed him with a cold, relentless eye.

Mr. Littlejohn was very much embarrassed. He explained in confused and halting words that he was not in quest of amorous adventure and totally unprepared for it. He had had a very trying day and had just been pursued by a regiment of horses.

"You didn't come up here to go to bed?" Her voice was like a knife.

"To bed?—Why, yes," admitted Mr. Littlejohn, and added hastily, "but—by myself."

"My God!" She stared at him. "I've met a lot of chiselers in my life but you win the leather medal. Get out!" And she pointed to the door with a gesture she had picked up from the movies.

"I'm really dreadfully sorry." Mr. Littlejohn edged toward the door. "I didn't understand—I thought you were just being kind to me."

"Nuts!" was the reply.

"Yes," he sighed, "I see. But I feel that I have been at fault, and I would like to compensate you for any time you've lost." He put his hand into his pocket and drew out a roll of bills. "Would ten dollars be enough?"

She almost fainted. She was so furious with herself she could have cut her stupid head off. But the remnant of her brains came to her rescue and she threw herself down on the bed and burst into well-simulated sobs.

Mr. Littlejohn, as her feline instinct had foreseen, did not know what to do. He leaned over the bed and begged her to compose herself. "Please don't.—You mustn't cry like that," he pleaded.

"I'm just a miserable, unhappy girl," she wailed, and turned her face away. All her life she had been kicked around until, like a homeless dog, she had learned to bare her teeth to every hand. And now a simple act of generous kindness, the first she could remember, showed her all that she had lost . . . She wished that she were dead.

Mr. Littlejohn was moved. She looked so frail and helpless in her nakedness. He strove to reassure her. She was too young to despair. A long life lay before her.

"Too late—too late—" she moaned.

"Nonsense," said Mr. Littlejohn. And he called her attention

to himself. Here was he, a man already deep in middle age, with a bad digestion and a blood pressure, and a wasted life behind him. Yet he had not despaired and was even at this moment starting out to—to . . . He broke off rather lamely.

She suffered the bank note to be pressed into her hand, and then suddenly sat up and dried her eyes which were as dry as dust.

"What a heartless, selfish girl I am," she said, "to lie here on the bed with my poor, tired daddy standing up." And she forced Mr. Littlejohn whose pulses were still bouncing pretty hard, to lie down in her place. Then she wet a dirty towel and put it on his forehead.

"Please, daddy, close your tired eyes," she crooned in a kind of baby talk. And she thought, if this old guy should go to sleep I could sneak that roll and beat it. She patted his bald head and thought again: Hell no! Why be a piker? There must be more where that came from. She stroked the black mustache.

"You still got a lot of stuff," she leered, "or it wouldn't grow like that."

Mr. Littlejohn blushed crimson and hastily closed his eyes. She wet the towel again and launched into the story of her life.

She said her name was Eleanor. This was a lie. Her name was Mabel Crotch. She said she came from Baltimore, from a fine old southern family (a lie). She had once spent three days in Baltimore in a disorderly house but had been discharged for incompetency. She came from a large family of morons in Moline, Illinois. She said that her mother had died when she was a little child (a lie), that her poor, dear father had lost his fortune in the Depression and died of grief (a lie). He was not dead and was, in fact, at the zenith of his career, having been on relief for three years. She said she had been deceived by a rich young man who, unbeknownst to her, already had a wife (a lie). She had gone out with a drummer in Moline and had taken the fifty cents he gave her and bought a lipstick with it.

Mr. Littlejohn missed some of this story. He was thinking rather earnestly of what he should do next. To explore the Enigma in a proper, thorough fashion he would have to do some traveling and would need a motorcar. He could rent one very likely but it wouldn't run itself and he had never learned to drive. The problem was immediate.

Mabel rambled on. She had run away from home to hide her shame, and then—just one thing and another. She choked and turned away her face.

"If I could only get away from it—" she moaned.

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. He sat up abruptly, took the towel from his forehead, and regarded Mabel with a kindly but calculating eye. "Can you drive a motorcar?"

"Can I drive?" She laughed disdainfully. "Until a year or so ago I always had a car and was used to every luxury." This was a lie. She had never had a car, but had once been intimate with a second-rate pickpocket who had taught her how to drive.

"Why then," smiled Mr. Littlejohn, "I believe I have an answer to your problem which will also solve my own. I am about to set out on a journey and am in need of a companion for my travels."

She caught her breath and hung on tight, and pinched herself to see if she were dreaming. She owed six weeks' room rent and was threatened with the street.

"All my life," continued Mr. Littlejohn, "I have been running on a treadmill—in the dark." He stood up and paced the floor. "Sitting on my tail at the bottom of a well. I have no more knowledge of the world than an oyster in its shell. But I am determined to get out and see with my own eyes what's going on. I mean to find some explanation for my life and for human life in general." He paused and added grimly, "It may be a long trip."

"It's wonderful!" breathed Mabel who had not understood a single word. She was thinking of the Ritz which she had thus far only seen from the outside.

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn and resumed his thoughtful pacing. "The point is—where to go."

"Florida," suggested Mabel eagerly.

"No," he said and shuddered. "There is no explanation for human life in Florida. I have been there and I know." He stroked his mustache absently, and suddenly he thought of Black Beard roaming the great open spaces of the West—the mountains and the desert. Far from the ant runs and the C.I.O.—from the Treasury and the Senate. The very core of life must stand revealed . . .

"The West," he cried and waved his arm expansively.

"Oh, daddy—" The West to her meant Moline, Illinois, but she tried to be cheerful anyway.

She threw her arms around his neck and kissed him on the forehead. She said he was exactly like her own dead daddy, and she felt she'd found a father and a friend. And she chattered on in a transport of excitement while she stepped into her dress and gathered up some mussy shreds of underwear which she stuffed into a shopping bag. She said all her clothes were at the laundry or the cleaner (a lie). She had no clothes. But anyhow she said it wouldn't matter because she could pick up what she needed on the way. If it turned out to be cold they could buy a fur coat somewhere. It was too bad she had loaned hers to a friend (a lie). She had never had a fur coat or a friend.

At a Driv-Ur-Self station on Sixth Avenue Mr. Littlejohn rented a Chevrolet sedan with New York license plates (327-429), and a radio which cost a little extra. He made a cash deposit on the car and gave his name as Adam Smith to which he added "Junior" with a vague idea that it sounded more authentic. He said he lived at 2145 South Gate Avenue, Montclair, New Jersey, and that he might be away for some time—he was taking a vacation with his *niece*. He made a point of this relationship. But the man only grinned and winked his eye. He said that Mr. Littlejohn could stay away forever if he liked, and as for the car—he could bring it back or leave it at any

Driv-Ur-Self station in the United States. The cars always came back, he said. But he was mistaken about this one.

They started. It was ten minutes past nine.

Mr. Littlejohn was not a back-seat driver, and he had ridden for so many years behind the faithful Andrew that he was oblivious to the common motoring hazards. This was fortunate for his peace of mind.

They sideswiped an L pillar and careened down Sixth Avenue. Mabel's idea of driving was to blow the horn and go ahead. She expected things to clear away in front of her. Between 14th Street and the tunnel she drove through seven stop lights, pulled a wheel off a pushcart, and terrified a number of pedestrians. They were over the Skyway before she got the brake pedal established in her mind as distinguished from the throttle.

They roared through Newark. Mabel was in a hurry. She thought that Mr. Littlejohn might change his mind and she'd better get along as fast as possible. The Rosydent factories loomed in the sky with their great electric signs: "Save the surface and nature will do the rest," "A breath like new-mown hay," and "A hair on the head is worth two on the collar." They burned as brightly as they ever had. As they disappeared behind him Mr. Littlejohn felt light enough to dance.—He was free.—Yes, he was free—at last.

About eleven o'clock, on U. S. Highway 22 a few miles west of Easton, Pennsylvania, they ran out of gas. There were lights a short distance up the road and Mr. Littlejohn set out to find assistance. The place turned out to be an auto camp with a lunchroom and a filling station. There was a sour-looking woman in the lunchroom and two boys in blue jeans who appeared to work there, and, sitting at a table in a corner, drinking bottled beer, a handsome, very rough-looking young man who bellowed at Mr. Littlejohn to come and have a drink. Mr. Littlejohn declined politely and he said to the woman that his car had broken down and he would like to secure accommoda-

tions for the night for himself and *niece*—two rooms and bath if possible.

The woman sent the boys to get the car, and she said she had a cabin with two rooms and a bath. It was just behind the lunchroom. Mr. Littlejohn inspected it and liked it very much. It was comfortable and warm with red roses on the wallpaper.

When he came back to the lunchroom he found Mabel sitting at the table with the rough young man. She was drinking beer and laughing noisily.

"This is my daddy," she announced. "C'mon, daddy, be a sport."

The young man addressed Mr. Littlejohn as "pop," and shook his hand with the grip of a gorilla. "Just call me Sam," he roared. And he added that he was a structural steel worker out of a job. "But *not* because I can't get work," he said. "Hell, no! I could go to work tomorrow." He pulled some papers from his pocket. "Cables from South America, from China. They all want me, because I know my business, see? But I ain't working any more. I'm done; washed up. I'll never touch another piece of steel."

"Why not?" said Mabel.

"You see this arm?" He rolled up his sleeve and revealed a monstrous object. "May it wither and fall off before I ever walk another girder." And he shouted for more beer.

Mr. Littlejohn inquired timidly whether he could get a shredded wheat biscuit and a glass of milk.

"That's baby food," the young man said contemptuously. "And it's poison for a man. What you need is hamburger." And he commanded from the younger of the boys who had come to take the order, "Three hamburgers on toasted buns, good and raw inside, with sliced Bermuda onion."

"But—I'm on a diet," protested Mr. Littlejohn.

"So what?" roared Sam. "You're on a diet, eh?—Well look at you! Your hair's all fallen out; you're fat; you're soft as

putty. If I hit you, it'd splash. That's because you're full of slop.—Diet hell!—What you need is hamburger."

"Aw, c'mon, daddy, be a sport," said Mabel.

"I should like nothing better," stammered Mr. Littlejohn, "but ——"

"I don't want to talk about it no more," said Sam. "Are you a friend of mine or not?"

Mr. Littlejohn assured him that he was.

"Okay. That settles it. It's a hamburger." And he waved the boy away, filled the glasses and shoved one at Mr. Littlejohn. "Bottoms up," he said and drained his at a gulp. "Where was I in my talk?"

"About not walking on another girder," suggested Mr. Littlejohn.

"Yeah, I remember now— I guess you're wondering why."

Mr. Littlejohn admitted that he was.

"Okay. I'm going to tell you, and you too, kid—" He patted Mabel on the back and knocked the breath out of her. "Whoa! Hold on a minute now!" He fixed Mr. Littlejohn with a stern and disapproving eye. "You can't drink beer like that. Open your mouth and pour it down your throat—like this—" He gave a demonstration. "There, you see. That washes out the gullet. Now, altogether, bottoms up!"

"My doctor—" Mr. Littlejohn began.

"Doctor? Hell! I'm your doctor now, and I said 'Bottoms up!' "

Mr. Littlejohn drank deeply. It was good beer and he liked it.

"Now I'll go on," said Sam. "Did you ever hear of Frisco?—and the Golden Gate?—Yeah.—Well, I built that bridge across it."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn.

"I don't like that attitude." Sam turned to Mabel. "Does your old man mean that I'm a liar?"

"Aw, c'mon, daddy, be a sport," said Mabel.

Mr. Littlejohn insisted he had meant nothing of the kind.

"We'll drink on that," said Sam and filled the glasses. "Okay. I built that bridge.—Sure, there were a lot of other fellows there, but, all the same, I built it—the biggest Goddamn bridge on earth. Three years I worked on her, setting girders in the sky, walking cables in the clouds. I gave her everything I got. You understand me?—what I mean?"

Mr. Littlejohn said he thought he did.

"Okay. I'm empty, see? My heart's hung up there on the Golden Gate. What do I care about these piffling things they want to build? Would Beethoven write jazz?—or Shakespeare make a movie? The guy that built the pyramids didn't finish up with bungalows.—Nuts to all that stuff! I built the biggest, swellest thing there is, and built myself right off the earth. There's no place left for me to go. I'm all washed up; I'm through." He banged the table with his fist until the glasses rattled. "It's pretty tough at twenty-nine." His eyes were moist with tears.

Mabel had not heard a single word. She was teasing a cockroach with a fork.

Mr. Littlejohn was very much affected. He said: "Perhaps—they'll build a bigger one some day."

"Sure," said Sam with a short and bitter laugh. "And I'll bet some saphead said that to Michelangelo." He whammed the table with his fist. "Don't try no soft-soap, coddling stuff on me. I'm not in diapers; I'm a man. And I can take it."

The boy came with the hamburgers and Sam hauled out a roll of bills.

"Take it out of that," he said. "This party is on me."

There were plenty of twenties in the roll and even fifties too. Mabel almost fell out of her chair. Then she pulled herself together, combed her hair, and put on a coat of lipstick.

"Money—stinking money!" He shoved the roll back in his pocket. "I'd give it all for one more moment in the air above the Golden Gate. I wish to God I'd slipped and fell on that

last day. I thought about it too." He sighed. "But they had a lousy net under it."

"Cut out the crepe," said Mabel. She wiggled her bust and edged closer underneath the table. "Where you bound for now?"

"Me?" He raised his head and stared at her. "What difference does it make. Your shadow's always with you no matter where you go." He paused and added gloomily, "Florida, I guess."

Mr. Littlejohn was deep in thought. He looked across the table at his clinical material whose faces seemed a little blurred and hazy. They were young and they were healthy. One of them was stupid and one of them was not. One was at the bottom and one was at the top. Yet neither was anywhere that seemed to be remotely satisfactory. The top?—*But top of what?*—There was the catch. I must look into this, he thought, when I feel a little stronger. The inside of his head was slightly fuzzy and his legs felt strangely numb. He drank a glass of beer to counteract these symptoms and then attacked the hamburger without a second thought. He had never had a hamburger before and this first one warmed the cockles of his heart.

"Melicious!" he affirmed. "Pardon me, I mean . . ." But his companions had forgotten all about him. He ate the luscious object, every scrap and crumb, the olive and the pickle too. And he was folding the lettuce leaf into convenient form when he distinctly heard, right behind his shoulder, a deep, stentorian voice.

"Horatio Littlejohn——"

He gasped and jerked around, and clutched the table just in time to keep from falling on his face. The two boys were sitting at the counter, their heads close together, their arms around each other's shoulders. There was no one else in sight.

"—disappeared from his residence in New York City between the hours of five and seven o'clock——"

It was the radio. Mechanically he reached for an amyl nitrite ampoule, but recollecting that he had none, he drank a glass of beer instead.

"—telephone torn from the wall . . . portrait of his father, the late Commodore ——"

He shuddered.

"—wall safe broken open . . . may have been the victim of robbery, kidnaping, or—murder ——"

He started violently and overturned his glass.

"—clean shaven and probably wearing a conventional business suit ——"

He felt for his mustache. He had them there all right: Fishkin and Hemlock and the C.I.O., and the Treasury and the Senate too. Let them do the worrying for a while. Let them squat on their tails . . . He laughed aloud. And the twins and Mrs. Littlejohn . . . He sighed and a tear ran down his nose. Well, they hadn't put themselves out much when he was there. Why had they changed his wallpaper when he was sick and helpless on his bed? Why were they always doing things like that? It was more than any man could bear.—Cog in a machine . . . Oyster in a shell . . . Treadmill—treadmill . . . Or was it *thread*mill?

"Treadmill—threadmill . . ." The room began to circle slowly and suddenly he thought he had better go to bed. He stood up, clinging to the table edge, and said:

"Mush schush—oysher cogsh—shredfill— Mush schush—shorry ——"

The two boys removed him from the room. He did not speak again.

III

"HELP!—HELP!—HELP!"

Mr. Littlejohn leaped from the bed with a pillow clutched against his breast. He knew he was awake but the screaming went right on. He couldn't remember where he was but his first thought was of fire so he stumbled to the door and threw it open. The sun was coming up but there was no sign of fire.

"Help!—Help!" And there flashed before his eyes, and vanished around the corner of the cabin, what looked like an animated blanket. The screams were coming out of it. In hot pursuit was the woman with the sour face, and bringing up the rear was the larger of the boys who had nothing on but blue jeans which he held up with both hands.

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn, and rubbed his eyes and stared.

The tail of the procession had barely disappeared before the head came into view again. Now he perceived that there was someone in the blanket because a head was sticking out of it, and, as it drew near, he recognized the other boy. The woman, who had saved her breath, was gaining rapidly when suddenly the quarry swerved and darted through the open door.

"Dear me—" Mr. Littlejohn retreated hastily.

"Oh, help me! Save me!" sobbed the breathless youth, and he fled across the room and crouched in the farthest corner.

At this moment the pursuers crossed the threshold.

"If you'd only listen to me—" the big boy panted, and he let go of his jeans to grab her arm.

"Don't speak to me! Don't touch me!" the woman shouted. She was clearly beside herself with fury.

"But—" He let go of her arm to grab his jeans which were slipping toward the floor.

"Er—pardon me—" murmured Mr. Littlejohn, and he snatched a blanket from the bed and flung it around his shoulders like a dressing gown.

"I'll teach you to play your dirty tricks," the woman snarled. And she started toward the corner where the other boy was cowering.

"Help!" shrieked the boy. "Oh, please don't let her touch me."

It was not an appeal to be ignored and Mr. Littlejohn stepped into the breach.

"One moment, please," he said.

"You mind your own affairs," she snapped.

"I will suffer no violence in my apartment," Mr. Littlejohn said firmly.

"If you'd just let me explain—" the big boy interposed.

"I guess you're good at that," the woman sneered. "Well, save your lying breath to cool your porridge. I'll 'tend to this, myself." Again she started toward the corner but Mr. Littlejohn stepped into her path.

"I demand an explanation," he said boldly.

"Oh, you do!" She stopped and glared at him. "All right then you can have it. This pair of tramps came here a week ago, begging for a job."

"That's true," the big boy said. "But you wanted us to stay. You told me that you'd lost your husband and you needed a man around the place."

"A man!" she sneered.

"All right. But I want this gentleman to understand——"

"Yes?—*What?*"

"Well, you know well enough," he blurted out. "I'm young

but I'm not blind. Why were you always after me to go walking in the moonlight?"

"Walking?—With *you*?—You dirty, lying, little beast!" She made a threatening gesture.

"Come, come," said Mr. Littlejohn, "let's pursue the present issue."

"I'll come to that," she said. "I gave these tramps a job out of the goodness of my heart, and a cabin there to live in, and good wholesome food to eat."

"We've earned our keep," the big boy said. Mr. Littlejohn motioned him to silence.

"A pair of lazy, good-for-nothing bums," the woman went on grimly. "And I thought there was something queer about them, but I couldn't tell just what. This morning they weren't up so I walked over to their cabin, and—well I heard something funny going on."

"So she walked into our room," the big boy said. "Walked right in without knocking."

"That's what I did: I walked right in." Her voice was like barbed wire.

"Well?" said Mr. Littlejohn. He felt chilly and confused.

"Well—" Suddenly she strode past him and, with one quick gesture, stripped off the sheltering blanket, and, so to speak, raised the curtain on the mystery. Beneath the blanket was a pink pajama jacket, and below it was—unmistakably—a girl.

"Good God," gasped Mr. Littlejohn and sank into a chair.

The girl screamed, tore the blanket from the woman, and flung herself, wrapped in it, on the bed.

"Now I guess you understand," the woman said, "what it was I *heard*."

Mr. Littlejohn was much too shocked to speak.

"Dirty little tramp!" She stalked to the door. "You too," she added to the boy. "I wouldn't be caught dead with you. You pack your junk and get or I'll telephone to town for the police." And she stamped out of the room and banged the door.

"I'm very sorry to have caused you this annoyance," said the boy and he introduced himself as Richard Pettingill, a recent graduate of the Harvard School of Business.

"Ah—" said Mr. Littlejohn. He was a Yale man himself, but he rather liked this boy whose manner was courteous and engaging.

"The young lady on the bed," the boy went on, "is my fiancée. In short we are engaged. Her name is Hildegarde." Mr. Littlejohn half rose and nodded at the bed. "I must not, for personal reasons, disclose her family name which however I assure you is both well known and honored in the realm of high finance. She is a graduate of Radcliffe."

The girl sat up and smiled bravely through her tears. Her hair was cut short like a boy's, but she was pretty in an elfin sort of way.

"We love each other," Richard said, "and are anxious to be married. We have complied with the formalities: our Wassermanns are negative. But—" He groaned and shook his head—"we are victims of the general economic situation."

"Nonsense!" said the girl. "We are victims of your pigheaded pride."

"Now, Hildegarde—" He let go of his blue jeans to make a soothing gesture. The girl screamed and Mr. Littlejohn hastily turned his head and looked out of the window.

"I beg your pardon—" Richard captured the blue jeans at his knees and restored them to their place. "They're a little large," he said, "but I think they'll be all right when they've been laundered."

Mr. Littlejohn coughed noncommittally.

"The facts," said the girl, "are as follows." And she went on to explain in a crisp, clearheaded way that they had expected to be married immediately on Richard's graduation from the Harvard School of Business when he stepped into the job which they both supposed was waiting. But no job had been waiting and the months had crawled away in excursions and alarms.

She hadn't cared, she said. She would have married Richard, job or no job. Her father was a man of wealth and wouldn't let them starve. . . .

Richard made a choking sound.

"All right," she said, "I know the way you feel but I'm telling this gentleman the facts." Her father could easily have provided a position in the bank but Richard would not hear to it.

"Nepotism!" muttered Richard.

"So what?" she said with an air of irritation. "Must I live like a tramp and be treated like a streetwalker because my father is a wealthy man?"

Richard groaned and bowed his head.

"Well, that's the size of it," she said. They had started out to hitchhike across the country with the idea that things might be better in the West. She had cropped her hair and dressed up like a boy to simplify the problem and avoid unpleasant questions. The role had not been difficult as she had been accustomed to play male parts in the Dramatic Club at Radcliffe. And the whole thing had been something of a lark until they hit this nasty auto camp.

Richard mumbled something about the economic situation.

"That's all right," said Hildegarde. "But love is a thing to take when you can get it."

"We're taking it," said Richard.

"And how!" she snapped.

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. He rather liked this girl who seemed to him to have both intelligence and spirit.

Richard took the floor. He spoke disparagingly of the administration. "We must return to first principles," he said. He said this several times but without elaboration. He added numerous figures and statistics. He mentioned General Motors reverently and referred to Rosydent as a perfect example of mismanagement and waste. It was all very confusing to Mr. Littlejohn whose head began to ache.

"You are boring this gentleman," said Hildegarde.

Richard apologized. He was merely trying to explain how impossible it was for him to accept an obligation which he could not discharge, and which would be flying in the face of economic law. . . .

Hildegarde stood up with the blanket wrapped around her slender figure. "Business is business, and love is love," she said. "But business is not love, and love is not business. And the more you talk the crazier it sounds." She burst into tears and sobbed that she thought she would go home.

"Oh, God!" groaned Richard, and he paced the floor holding up his blue jeans.

Mr. Littlejohn felt a warm glow of affection for them both. He begged them to compose themselves while he reviewed the situation. After some thought he said:

"I think I understand your problem and your respective points of view. And both of you are right. Love is a rare and beautiful experience which should not be sacrificed." Hildegarde nodded earnestly. "*But*," continued Mr. Littlejohn, "integrity is something which may not be lightly put aside."

Richard smiled sadly and Hildegarde looked troubled.

"Still there should be some practical solution to this matter," Mr. Littlejohn went on, "one by which both integrity and love may be preserved—" He rose and slowly paced the floor with his blanket dragging gracefully at his heels. Then suddenly he paused and his face lighted up with satisfaction. "I believe that the answer is in sight," he said, and he inquired eagerly if Richard could drive a car.

"Anything on wheels," cried Hildegarde.

"Capital!" said Mr. Littlejohn. "I have a project in my mind, but before reaching a decision I should like to discuss it with my—er—niece." And, oblivious to the startled glances which Richard and Hildegarde exchanged, he hurried to the connecting door and knocked upon it lightly. There was no answer and he knocked again.

"If—" said Hildegarde with a slightly curling lip—"if you are looking for that woman ——"

"My *niece*," Mr. Littlejohn insisted.

"As you please," shrugged Hildegarde. "In any case she left at 2:00 A.M. with the gentleman called Sam—for Florida, she said."

"Indeed?" murmured Mr. Littlejohn without the twitching of an eye. Deep down inside he was conscious of a great sense of relief. "Then we need not trouble to consult her, and I will come directly to the point." He began by stating that he had been running on a treadmill all his life and sitting on his tail at the bottom of a well.

"I don't follow that at all," said Richard with a frown. "You can't run on a treadmill while you're sitting in a well."

"Oh, God—" groaned Hildegarde.

"My figures of speech have been perhaps unfortunate," Mr. Littlejohn admitted. "But the fact remains that I have no more knowledge of the world than an oyster in its shell." And he went on to explain that he was tired of it all, and bewildered and confused, and had set out on a journey whose purpose was to find an answer to the problem—the enigma of his life and of human life in general.

"It's a grand idea," said Hildegarde, but Richard still looked troubled.

"Thank you," said Mr. Littlejohn. And he added that he was traveling in a motorcar which he did not know how to drive, and in consequence was looking for a chauffeur. He would gladly pay a proper wage and expenses while en route.

"Hurray!" cried Hildegarde.

But Richard shook his head. He said that the whole thing sounded phony. It was founded on a mass of contradictions: a treadmill and a well and an oyster in a shell. There was simply no sense in it. And anyway who would go out to search the world for something that they taught in every school. There was a course at Harvard covering the whole subject.

"If you mention Harvard just once more, I'll scream," said Hildegarde. And she threw a pillow at him.

Mr. Littlejohn held up his hand for silence.

"The question of my sanity," he said with dignity and firmness, "need not be introduced into this matter. And inquiry need not extend beyond the fact that I am marooned here in this auto camp with a car that I can't drive. What I want is a chauffeur. And if I choose to prospect all the dunghills in the Middle West for oriental pearls—that's my affair."

"That's common sense," said Hildegarde with decision in her eyes. "And you can take this job or I'll take the first bus home."

"There is one thing more," Mr. Littlejohn announced. "The position is dependent on your marriage."

"What!" Richard recoiled. "But suppose you find this thing you're looking for—tomorrow?"

"It is not likely that I shall," Mr. Littlejohn replied. "But that is a chance that you must take."

"No!" shouted Richard. "How can I marry this young and trusting girl when I don't know that my job will last a day? What I want is—*security*."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. And then, without conscious cerebration, the words came from his lips: "All men seek security, but it does not exist." He felt a little giddy and sat down hastily on the bed. The idea he had just expressed had never occurred to him before.

Richard groaned and fumed. He said that it was heresy. But Hildegarde started for the door, and he surrendered.

Mr. Littlejohn dismissed them with instructions to be prepared to leave in a quarter of an hour. He felt a pleasant glow of satisfaction. Love had triumphed and integrity had been preserved: they belonged together some way. There was of course this question of security. He thought about it while he dressed. Was there security or wasn't there? He had spoken with conviction which perhaps he didn't have. Still, could one ever count on anything—*tomorrow*? Life itself was insecure,

and if life was insecure . . . He combed his mustache thoughtfully. Dear me! He had never thought of that. All his life he, himself, had been struggling for security of one sort or another and—lo and behold—there might be no such thing. The whole idea was staggering and should have been depressing, but, strangely enough, it didn't seem to be.

He found the sour woman in the lunchroom. She was swatting flies with angry, vicious strokes. He paid his bill and Mabel's too. He thought it better not to mention Mabel. The woman slammed his change down on the counter. He picked it up and thanked her.

"I guess you think I'm pretty mean," she said in a harsh, defiant voice.

"Why, no," said Mr. Littlejohn, "I don't."

"Well, I am." She blinked her eyes to hide the tears. "But it's horrible to be—alone."

"Yes—" he nodded slowly. "Yes, I know." He wanted to say something else but no words came to his lips.

The Chevrolet was waiting at the door. Hildegarde, dressed now like a girl, got down smartly and held the door for him. She said she had assumed the place of footman. Richard, rigid as a ramrod, swung the car onto the highway with a fine professional air, and they were off.

Mr. Littlejohn was still absorbed in thought. He was thinking of the woman with the sour face, of security, and of life and death in general. After a while he said:

"Suppose you had spent a lifetime digging in a mountain, searching for a cavern full of gold, and at last you came to it and found that it was empty—how would you feel?"

"Disappointed, sir," said Richard.

"Like a fool," said Hildegarde.

"No," smiled Mr. Littlejohn, "*relieved.*"

They stopped at a lunch counter for breakfast. Mr. Littlejohn ordered one soft boiled egg and a glass of milk, but on second though, he switched to buckwheat cakes and sausage which he

washed down with two large mugs of coffee. He felt particularly well; better, he thought, than he had ever felt before. Hildegarde was really very pretty, and her boyish little figure was quite charming in a dress; and she was cute and said amusing things in a gay and airy way. It was a very pleasant meal. Even the counter man joined in and told a funny story. They were just preparing to depart when a car stopped at the door and two Pennsylvania State Police officers stepped out of it and came into the lunchroom. They were young, good-looking, peppy fellows. One of them said:

"Who belongs to that car with the New York license plates?"

"I do," said Mr. Littlejohn.

"Okay, brother," said the other boy with a very friendly air. "We got to check up every car with New York license plates. We're looking for a guy that might be kidnaped."

"It's the Littlejohn case," his partner explained.

"Ah—" said Mr. Littlejohn, and hastily gulped some coffee which went down the wrong way. When he had recovered his composure he gave his name as Alfred Motherwell, and his address as 333 Prospect Street, Portchester, New York. He could not remember the name he had given at the Driv-Ur-Self station but this new one pleased him. He said that Hildegarde was his niece and that Richard was her husband—he was taking them on a vacation trip out west—perhaps to California. One of the officers wrote it all down in a book, and then he laughed and said it was all baloney anyway because looking for a guy like Littlejohn who, from his description, looked like everybody else, was like looking for a needle in a haystack.

"But a guy like you—" He pointed his finger at Mr. Littlejohn, "with that shoe brush on your lip—you couldn't hide behind a mountain."

Everyone laughed heartily and Mr. Littlejohn blushed crimson. Then the other officer, who had been studying him intently, suddenly slapped his hip and said:

"By God, I got it now! I knew this gent reminded me of someone. Don't you see it, Joe?"

"Yeah—someone—" said Joe doubtfully.

"Why, he's a ringer for the bandit, Black Beard."

"Hum—" Mr. Littlejohn was thrilled and terribly embarrassed.

Now the counter man joined in and said that he had thought the same thing all the time but had not wanted to express it. And he produced a newspaper with a picture of a ferocious-looking man with a heavy black mustache. Everybody looked at it and there was a marked resemblance.

"But I thought he had a beard," stammered Mr. Littlejohn.

"Naw," said Joe. "Just that foliage on his lip. And he'll die before he'll cut it off. He thinks his luck is in it."

"There's a guy for you," the other boy chimed in. "Marked like a black jack in a deck of cards, but what the hell does he care? A real lone wolf that don't trust nobody or nothing."

"And does he make suckers of them G men!" laughed Joe. "Say, he runs them like a rabbit in a dog race." He slapped Mr. Littlejohn on the shoulder and added humorously that it was a good thing Black Beard was known to be in Idaho or they'd have to run him in.

Everybody laughed at this idea, including Mr. Littlejohn who then bought some gum drops and treated to cigars. A few moments later they were rolling down the highway.

Mr. Littlejohn felt pleasantly excited. He said:

"I have never in my life before been mistaken for a bandit."

"It's only from the nose down," Hildegarde assured him.

"Ah—" said Mr. Littlejohn, and he pulled the visor of his cap as far down on his nose as it would go.

The Indian summer sun was high and warm, and there was fragrance in the air. The fields were green and sleepy cattle drowsed in them. The trees were brown and green and gold. It was a day to be alive—and . . .

"A fine day for a wedding," Mr. Littlejohn suggested.

Richard stopped the car.

"Sir," he said, "I am merely on probation, and until it is determined that I can give satisfaction, I prefer to maintain the status quo."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn, and he glanced at Hildegarde. Her chin looked very stiff.

"Twenty-four hours," she said firmly.

"Forty-eight," urged Richard.

"Okay." She nodded briefly. "But if anything goes wrong I'm going home to father and you can have the status quo to sleep with by yourself."

They drove on.

Mr. Littlejohn reflected: Richard's point of view was sound —cautious and discreet, but not romantic. Deep-buried memories stirred: a girl that he had known in his last year at Yale—in a millinery shop; a pretty little thing, not unlike Hildegarde. He had loved her very deeply and had spent such precious hours holding hands among the hats. He would have married her without a job, without a cent, without a thought . . . He sighed. But he hadn't after all. The Commodore had taken care of that, and had sent him off to Europe with a tutor on a freighter. Heigh-ho!—It had happened a long, long time ago, and had not happened again. No, not *just that*—that fine, sweet flowering of romance—that throbbing ecstasy . . . What was her name?—Mary. But Mary what?—Mary Smith?—or Mary Brown?—Not that but something like it. Well, well, he hadn't thought of her in years.

Something in his pocket was digging in his back. It turned out to be the mouth organ he had purchased from Mr. Bodenheim. He had never played a mouth organ or any other instrument, but had often wished he could. He turned it in his hands and felt an urge to make harmonious sounds with it, so he put it to his lips and essayed a gentle note. It was really very simple.

Hildegarde turned her head and smiled. She said she could

play the mouth organ and, when the opportunity presented, she would teach him in an hour. Then, with a little practice, he could play anything he liked because, as she could see, he had a natural talent for it.

Mr. Littlejohn thanked her. He had never been so happy.

After lunch she kept her word, and in an hour's time he could almost play "Home Sweet Home" entirely by himself. When the lesson was concluded Richard turned on the radio and got the news.

There was something about Black Beard. The bandit had eluded the G men in Idaho and had just turned up in Texas. Mr. Littlejohn was conscious of a thrill of satisfaction. He felt for his mustache and pulled his cap down lower.

The radio went on. There was nothing new on the Littlejohn case. Police were working day and night but thus far without clues. The underworld was being combed and all avenues of egress from New York were being scrutinized. It was impossible to say whether the Rosydent chief had been the victim of kidnapers or robbers, whether he was dead or alive. There was the possibility that, in a fit of despondency occasioned by his business complications, he had committed suicide. They were dragging the East River . . .

At this point Mr. Littlejohn asked to have the radio turned off.

After a while Richard began to talk. He had made an exhaustive study of Rosydent, he said. Indeed his thesis at Harvard, whose title had been "Common Forms of Corporate Mismanagement," was based entirely on a clinical analysis of the Rosydent corporation. Rosydent had been an ideal choice because it combined practically all aspects of mismanagement which were rarely found united in a single corporation.

"For example," he explained, "the evils which result from executive vacillation are not often encountered coupled with the evils which follow in the wake of vicious tenacity of purpose. And evils resulting from sheer ignorance of the simplest

economic laws are seldom found in company with those proceeding from a source of brilliant, if unbalanced, vision."

Yet there it was, he said. Strength and weakness, wisdom and stupidity, integrity and . . . He shook his head. A chaos of conflicting stresses which racked the corporate structure this way and that, but never served to drive it straight ahead on any course. There was just one place to look for an explanation of a phenomenon of this sort, and that was—at the top—the man who stood upon the bridge with the engine signal lever in his hand.

"I do not know this man, Littlejohn," he said. "And yet, in a way, I know him very well—just as one may come to know the author of a book from reading what he writes." He paused and sighed. "Despite his fine endowments he is a weak and helpless man, irresolute, confused, groping in a fog, without a clear objective in his mind, without a chart or compass." He paused again and added gloomily. "It would really be too bad if he were found."

Mr. Littlejohn asked to have the radio turned on again.

The golden afternoon began to wane. A great black cloud crawled up the western sky and swallowed up the sun. There was a damp chill in the air and the landscape turned colorless and dreary. He shivered; of a sudden he felt very much *alone*.

"We are coming to a storm," he said.

"No, sir," said Richard. "That is Pittsburgh."

"Ah—" sighed Mr. Littlejohn. "Let us pass through it as directly and as rapidly as possible." He closed his eyes and fell into a dismal reverie.

The miles sped by to the radio accompaniment of crooning jazz and flat-voiced exhortations: soap and soup, drugs and dress, boots and beer, blah and blah—an audible parade of human emptiness.

He thought: I have never had a compass or a chart—but what use is a chart upon a shoreless ocean?—and what good is a compass if there are no directions?—yes, and what good is a

clock if, as they say, there is no such thing as time?—Of what avail are instruments to measure nothingness?—He groaned. I am a fool. I shall not find the answer to the enigma of my life or of human life in general because there is no answer . . .

"It's all right now," said Hildegarde.

He opened one eye cautiously. The sun had set and left a crimson afterglow behind it. The first stars twinkled in a purple sky. Lights fled across the fields and dodged among the trees. Motorcars roared by. Houses, fences, poles with singing wire, the wind that blew against his face, the magic carpet of the road that rolled away before him and curled up at his heels . . . Yes, *here was life itself*; there was no denying that. And the answer to the mystery was somewhere buried in it. Deep within him something quivered like the string of a violin.

A car overtook them, shot by and cut in sharply to avoid one coming toward them. It was a cabriolet. Mr. Littlejohn caught his breath and saw, in a momentary flash of meeting headlights, a boy and girl sitting close together, and a figure in the rumble seat crouched against the wind. And he heard a crooning radio and a girl's shrill laugh above it.

Richard exclaimed and swerved to the right onto the shoulder of the road. The fenders barely missed. He thumbed the siren button in angry protest. The cabriolet replied derisively. Its tail light zigzagged like a firefly and disappeared around a curve. It was traveling very fast.

"Neckers," said Hilegarde.

"And drunk," commented Richard.

An instant afterwards they heard the crash—just one terrific crash. They came around the curve where a roadside warning blinked at them—and then an intersection with a stop light hung above it, and—a shapeless shadow sprawled across the road. . . .

"God—" said Hildegarde.

They stopped with screaming brakes, scrambled from the car and ran. Their headlights told the story: an oil truck coming

from the right—half over on its side—with one light on and pointed at the sky . . . The other car?—At first they didn't see it. And then—its top askew—not badly damaged . . . But the front of it was gone. No, not gone but buried in the oil tank . . .

Mr. Littlejohn tripped over a wheel which was not attached to anything. There was a dreadful silence in the wreckage. But the radio crooned on as if it didn't know:

> Let me cuddle in your heart——

He found the door. The glass was like a spider web but solid. He pressed his face against it . . . They were sitting just as he had seen them when they passed—far over to the left, her head upon his shoulder. He could not see the steering wheel at all, and the bottom of the car, to the level of the seat, seemed to be filled with something . . . He seized the handle of the door and it came off in his hand. It was wet and sticky. Mechanically he sniffed it. It was oil.

> That's where I want to build my nest,
> Where there's never any storm, any trouble, any strife,
> In the center of your heart——

Richard was tearing at the top with his bare hands. There was a jagged hole in it but the fabric was tough and resisted all his efforts.

"Goddamn this thing," he sobbed. "Goddamn this thing——"

Mr. Littlejohn grabbed hold and tried to help but there wasn't room for both of them. He went back to the door. The glass was shatter proof and he had nothing but his hands. He beat upon it with his fists and it bent but would not break. He groaned. It seemed to him that years had passed. People were coming now: voices—sirens—lights . . .

"Look out!" screamed Hildegarde.

A little tongue of flame shot up from nowhere, and then another and another. He went on beating with his fists.

"Richard!—Come back!"

He could see quite plainly now and his heart stood still with horror. The whole front of the car had telescoped and sheared back through the seat. Where their legs had been was a tangled mass of wreckage. Yet there they sat so naturally, their heads dropped forward close together, her arm through his. He imagined that she moved . . . The glass was giving way at last. And then there was a sizzling, crackling sound and flame ran swiftly, twisting like a powder train . . . Richard dragged him back.

"No!—Wait!—We've got to get them out—" He struggled breathlessly.

Then, with a roar, the whole thing was ablaze. They turned and ran into the ditch. Already there were people there. Mr. Littlejohn sat down and put his hands over his face.

"Jesus!" said a voice beside him. "Will you listen to that radio?"

> And I believe the birds know best.
> That's why I want to build my nest
> In the center of——

It stopped. The heat was like a blast furnace. Motor cops appeared and herded people back. One of them came up to Mr. Littlejohn; he was taking names of witnesses.

"Is that your car back there with the New York license plates?"

Mr. Littlejohn nodded vaguely. His teeth were chattering.

"What's your name?"

"Horatio Littlejohn——"

"Yeah?" said the cop with a very ugly scowl. "Wise guy, eh?—Cut out the comedy!"

"Er, pardon me—" stammered Mr. Littlejohn. And he gave

his name as James P. Smith and said he lived at 497 Oak Street in Hartford, Connecticut.

"Okay," said the cop suspiciously. "Get back out of the way."

Mr. Littlejohn walked back and leaned against a fence post. Tongues of burning oil spread across the road and the air was filled with a stench of greasy soot. Traffic was blocked both ways and the crowd kept growing. Richard and Hildegarde came up. Richard said that the driver of the truck had been accounted for. He had been thrown from his cab and, though dazed, appeared uninjured.

Mr. Littlejohn nodded absently, and then suddenly shook as with a chill.

"The other one—" he gasped.

"What other one?"

"In the back—"

"That's right," cried Hildegarde. "There was someone in the rumble."

"My God," said Richard, "so there was."

"We ought to tell the cops," said Hildegarde.

They turned and ran along the ditch. Mr. Littlejohn stumbled over something soft and fell.

"Say, what the hell—" a voice complained. "Can't you find some place to step except my stomach?"

Mr. Littlejohn apologized. He explained that he had just remembered there was someone in the rumble seat . . .

"That was me," said the voice. Its owner sat up stiffly—a surly-looking youth with a slightly Jewish countenance and a mop of bright-red hair. "I saw it coming and I jumped."

"Thank God," said Mr. Littlejohn.

"It knocked the wind out of me."

"Were they—friends of yours?" Hildegarde inquired.

"Hell no! They picked me up about an hour ago." He stared glumly at the fire. "My suitcase is in there."

"Were they drunk?" asked Richard.

"Write your own ticket." He gazed sadly at his clothes which were ripped and caked with dirt. "I had another suit in it."

"But don't you know anything about them?" demanded Mr. Littlejohn.

"How would I?" He sighed and added bitterly, "You never know a thing about these birds that pick you up."

A cop shouted at them from the roadside: "Get going now! Detour to the right! Follow the flares!"

They walked back to the car in silence. Wires had been cut out of a panel of the fence, and red flares marked the detour inside the field and back into the road beyond the wreck. Cars with glaring headlights were strung out to infinity; engines raced and choked; motor cycles dodged in and out untangling knots of traffic. The show was over and the audience eager to be off.

"If you're going west—" the redheaded youth suggested.

"Why, certainly—" said Mr. Littlejohn.

The boy got in with Richard. They crawled and bumped across the field. They could see a group of men working with extinguishers but the fire still flamed high, and the greasy reek of oil still filled the air. There was another odor too. Mr. Littlejohn sniffed thoughtfully—and suddenly felt ill.

"What is that smell?" said Hildegarde. But no one answered her.

They came out into the highway.

Mr. Littlejohn felt tired and confused. There was *life* and—there was *death*. He could still see the car as it flashed by in the night—could hear the radio—the girl's shrill laugh. Life and death. They were very different things, yet you couldn't think of one without the other—as if they were both parts of something else. But parts of *what*? Of what could life be part except of life itself?—Life couldn't be a part of death, but—could death be part of life? Hum . . . If life were like the sea, and death just a current flowing through it, and you drifted in and

out—in and out—but still you were always in the sea . . . He sighed and shook his head. It was pretty tangled up.

They stopped at an auto camp near Steubenville, Ohio, and sat down at a table in a cold and dreary lunchroom. Mr. Littlejohn ordered an Old-fashioned cocktail and a bowl of onion soup. The stranger introduced himself. He said his name was Patrick Hammerstein.

"I'm a Jew," he said defiantly. "But my mother was an Irish Catholic." He was breezy and assertive but reserved about himself. To Richard's rather pointed questions he replied that he'd been on a job in Newark which was finished for the time, and he was headed for the Coast where he had some work to do, but he didn't say what kind of work it was. He complained about the service and the food and was short and sarcastic with the waitress. Then he called for a Pittsburgh evening paper and scanned the headlines with a gloomy eye.

"Well, Littlejohn's still missing. And is that a dirty trick!"

Mr. Littlejohn was startled. He asked why.

"Why?" Patrick slammed the paper on the table. "Because it stirs up sympathy—because the public is a sucker—because the administration hasn't got an ounce of guts. That's why."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn.

"A lot of people think that Littlejohn's a sap. Don't kid yourself. That guy is as hard and slick as wire. I'll bet my shirt he framed this thing himself, and he's sitting in some ritzy spot with the laugh on everybody."

"Nonsense!" said Richard. "Littlejohn is a simple-minded weakling. Why, I've made a study of the man."

"You are nuts," retorted Patrick. "I've made a study of him too, and I tell you he's the smartest crook in the whole industrial system. You mark my words: within a week the papers will be weeping blood over him; the Treasury will compromise its suit for the money that he stole; the Senate will crawl back in its hole with a stirring vote of confidence; and the C.I.O. will take another beating!"

"Amen to that!" Richard overturned a cup of coffee. "But let me tell you this: Horatio Littlejohn's return to the industrial world would be nothing short of a calamity, and a step toward anarchy and chaos."

"I see," snarled Patrick. "You're one of *those* guys . . ."

Mr. Littlejohn excused himself, retired to his cabin and went immediately to bed. He was tired and his head ached, but sleep evaded him.

Was he a scoundrel or a fool?—and how could a person tell? These young people settled things so easily. But how was one to choose between their views? If everything was relative, then how could he be measured? What was the *absolute* by which his life and conduct might be gauged? And had he a volition in the matter?—or was he just the tool of some malignant force? And were these matters factors in the fundamental problem? Well, they might be or they mightn't. It was much too soon to tell.

He closed his eyes but little tongues of flame shot up behind the lids and again he saw the figures in the corner of the wreck with their heads so close together. Life and death. Life today, and death—tomorrow. But was there a *tomorrow?*—or a *yesterday*? Things that had been or were to be—where were they *now*? His eyes popped open. Why, they really *weren't* at all. They were only what you *thought*: remembered, hoped, or feared. The moment that ticked by on the clock had no existence, nor any moment that was still to come. Life was *now*—and *now* was always here—eternal. It didn't matter what you'd been or what you were to be. You were a part of life—of this living moment of eternity. Hum . . . It was certainly a very startling idea. If one could just hold on to things like that . . .

He sighed contentedly and fell asleep.

IV

MR. LITTLEJOHN AROSE REFRESHED IN mind and body. The Sun shone through his window; birds twittered in the trees; the day was fine. It was good to be alive. He combed his mustache, dressed and strolled into the lunchroom. For breakfast he had grapefruit, ham and eggs, and two large cups of coffee. Then he called for his bill which, he noted with surprise, included Patrick's. He was even more surprised when he stepped outside the door and saw Patrick sitting in the front seat of the car. Hildegarde was in the back and Richard was tinkering with a tire with a very glum expression.

"Good-morning—" said Mr. Littlejohn.

Patrick grinned and waved his hand. "I thought—if you were going west——"

"Why, er, certainly—" murmured Mr. Littlejohn with just a trace of hesitation, and he was about to step into the car when Richard caught his eye and motioned him aside.

"Sir," he began, controlling his emotion with an effort, "may I inquire if it is your intention to take *that person* with us?" And he indicated Patrick with his thumb.

Mr. Littlejohn smiled vaguely.

"Because, sir, that person is a *communist.*"

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn.

"He has just come from Newark where he has been preaching his seditious, filthy doctrine to the Rosydent employees. He told me so himself. And he is now on his way to spread treason in the ranks of the migratory workers on the Coast."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn again.

"He is, by his own statement, a menace to our democratic principles and the sacred rights of property on which they have been founded. And I respectfully suggest, sir, that you ask him to get out of our car."

Mr. Littlejohn demurred. He said, gently but firmly, that concerning matters of this kind there was a great amount of disagreement, and that rather than align himself with any faction he was desirous to consort on equal terms with all. While some personal annoyance and discomfort might result, still, on the other hand, in a search for an answer to the enigma of his life and of human life in general, all parties should be heard and no stone left unturned. He paused and added thoughtfully:

"The quest for truth does not involve any social or economic prejudice."

"Sir," protested Richard in a choking voice, "as an American citizen and a graduate of the Harvard School of Business, I do not see how I can sit there with *that person* who is not only a communist, but is also—*not a gentleman.*"

"The responsibility," replied Mr. Littlejohn, "is mine."

"Very good, sir." Richard stiffened like a soldier. "I will try."

"Your domestic life," smiled Mr. Littlejohn, "may depend on your success." And he glanced at Hildegarde from the corner of his eye.

Richard suppressed a shudder, got into the car and sat down like a ramrod.

Away they went. The sun was warm; the sky was blue; the autumn leaves wove tapestries. Mr. Littlejohn breathed deeply and felt a tingling in his veins as if the air were wine.

"They were at it half the night," said Hildegarde. She seemed irritable and depressed. "And my coat's all over oil that I picked up from the wreck." She rubbed the spots halfheartedly with a handkerchief she had soaked in gasoline. "It isn't any use; they won't come out."

"A coat!" beamed Mr. Littlejohn. "The very thing! I will

get you a new one for a wedding gift in the first large town we come to."

"You are a dear—" She smiled and cuddled up to him.

Patrick stretched out comfortably and spoke of toilet seats. They had won that battle anyway before the curtain fell and Littlejohn skipped out of town.

"Sixteen toilet seats for every hundred workers." He grinned and then he scowled. But fifty would be better and they'd come to that some day, for a toilet seat, if you needed it at all, was something that you needed right away.

"The future of this country," Richard said, "does not rest on toilet seats."

"That's what you think," snarled Patrick. "But let me tell you something: the toilet seat remains a Marxian symbol; it expresses the class struggle in a language that the worker understands."

Richard said, between his teeth, that on close examination he could see some further symbols in the subject.

"Yeah?—What?"

"There is a lady present."

"I got you," Patrick said with cold fury in his eye. "And I'll remember that dirty Tory crack. But let me tell you something: I'll bet you that old buzzard, Horatio Littlejohn, has got twenty toilet seats in his house on 69th Street—or *five* for every member of his family. If you call that democracy, I'll eat it."

Mr. Littlejohn was startled. Twenty toilet seats? Could there really be so many? His own and Mrs. Littlejohn's; one for Punch and one for Judy: that was four. The guest rooms—three. And four plus three was seven. Two in the servants' quarters, and there might be another in the basement. And— Oh, yes, one off of the kitchen, and one under the front stairs. He kept count on his fingers. Ten—or possibly eleven. Well, it wasn't as vicious as it sounded. With the servants and the family it was only one apiece. Still, it did exceed the ratio of the proletarian

dream by two to one. He sighed and reached in his pocket for his mouth organ.

Patrick and Richard were still snapping at each other.

"If you ask me," said Hildegarde, "the really dangerous people in a democratic state are the ones who think they know the way to save it."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. And he went on with his lesson from the point he had left off the day before. In half an hour he had a general idea of the "Suwanee River" and was tackling the "Rhapsody in Blue" which was exciting but more difficult.

In intervals of relaxation Patrick found fault with Richard's driving and also complained about the car. He said it had no power and no pick-up and was, in fact, a pile of junk. To ride in such a jalopy was courting sudden death.

Richard ground his teeth and skidded round a curve.

"Look out!" yelled Patrick, jamming his feet on imaginary brakes.

The highway was blocked with a W.P.A. construction sign and a man with a red flag was waving them to stop. He came up to the car, a young, pleasant-looking fellow, and explained that the detour was a one-way road. They would have to wait a little while until he got a signal from his partner at the other end.

Mr. Littlejohn got out to stretch his legs. There was an old, battered car standing in the ditch and he walked over toward it and glanced in. The back seat had been extended and covered with a mattress, and two little children, perhaps three and five, were sitting there playing with some broken toys. They looked up and smiled at him.

"Dear me—" he murmured.

"They're my kids." It was the young man with the flag who had come up behind him. He noted Mr. Littlejohn's expression and reassured him cheerfully. "They're all right. You see, their

mother died six months ago and I have to take 'em with me to my work."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. He felt a tightening in his throat.

"Usually, when the weather's nice like it is today, I leave 'em play around outside, but the little feller's got a cold so I thought I better keep him in, and of course when I keep one in, I got to keep the other. They're awful good about it."

"But—isn't there someone you could leave them with?"

"No, sir, there really ain't. But they don't mind. They kind of like to be around with me, I guess. When you're on relief the hours ain't so long, and we're always going different places and seeing something new. Of course when they're old enough to go to school——"

"Yes—" said Mr. Littlejohn. He wanted to say something else but couldn't.

"I'm mighty lucky in a way. I got them two, and—I got a job." A red flag waved in the distance. "Okay. It's all clear now, sir. You can go ahead."

"Thank you—" Mr. Littlejohn hesitated and held out his hand. "Thank you—" He walked back slowly and got into the car.

"Take it easy on these ruts," warned Patrick. "The springs are made of tin."

Richard drove the detour at fifty miles an hour and did not miss a bump. Mr. Littlejohn was silent and absorbed. He thought: I shall never understand this thing called *life* because it is different everywhere you touch it.

Hildegarde was looking at him anxiously. After a while she said: "A penny for your thoughts."

"I'm afraid they are not worth so much," Mr. Littlejohn replied. "I was thinking that human life can be very beautiful, and that whether it is or not does not seem to depend on the external factors."

"No, I suppose not," Hildegarde agreed, but she really wasn't listening.

They were now on Highway 40, and they stopped for lunch at a roadside counter some miles west of Columbus. Mr. Littlejohn had a hamburger which was bathed in mustard sauce and sprinkled with chopped nuts. It was good but difficult to eat as the nuts caught in his mustache. Patrick sniffed the greasy air disdainfully. He said they might have picked a decent place and said it loud enough for the counter man to hear. He was a large man with an ugly jaw and he looked very hard at Patrick, who hastily changed the subject. He pointed to an electric plate and said:

"There's a swell example of this racketeering capitalistic system. We got to pay a gang of predatory crooks for the juice to boil our coffee."

The counter man said nothing but he slit a pumpkin pie with grimly savage strokes. Patrick went on blithely:

"Heat, light, power—the breath of life to any social order: they steal it from the people whose heritage it is, and sell it back to them for ten times what it costs. Look at T.V.A. and Boulder Dam. That shows what can be done. Let me tell you something: if we could harness half the kilowatts this country can supply, we'd have juice enough to—to ——"

"To electrocute the unemployed," snapped Richard.

Patrick replied with a strong, four-letter word, and Richard hit him in the eye and knocked him off the stool. The counter man appeared to be waiting for the chance. He grabbed them both and threw them out into the road without apparent effort. Mr. Littlejohn and Hildegarde went on with their lunch. When the man came back he said:

"I'm sorry, mister, but if there's any scrapping in this dump, I got to have a hand in it myself."

Mr. Littlejohn smiled noncommittally and asked for a piece of pumpkin pie.

"Maybe you think I like this lousy job?" He slid the pie

along the counter. "Maybe you think it's fun to stand in here all day and listen to a lot of cockeyed talk?"

Mr. Littlejohn protested: he had thought nothing of the kind.

"You're a gentleman. That's why." He leaned with his big fists on the counter. "Say, tell me this: what the hell good would more juice do—for me, for you, or anyone? Take a walk through any town at night. They look like Christmas trees. When I was a kid it used to get dark at night and you could see the stars, but hell!—we got all over that." He laughed. "By God, there isn't scarcely room for one more neon sign. They got 'em plastered now like flies on something dead. That's what they do with juice: peddle their phony junk. Juice! Hell! We got too damn much now." He banged the counter. "I'll tell you something, mister: it ain't more juice this country needs—*it's hamburger.*"

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. He paid the check and they went out to the car.

Richard and Patrick were sitting in their places, and Richard was writing something on a scrap of paper. He put it away quickly and swung the car onto the highway. Nobody spoke.

Mr. Littlejohn reflected: juice is important—heat, light, and power are necessary things. Hamburger is important too. It symbolizes food. Juice and hamburger—our physical requirements. And suppose they were miraculously and abundantly provided for everybody in the world—would that be enough? No. He shook his head. There would still be *life* and *death*, and no answer to the questions that they raise . . .

When the silence had become oppressive, he asked to have the radio turned on. Richard touched the switch and a girl began to sing:

> That's where I want to build my nest,
> Where there's never any storm, any trouble, any strife,
> In the center of your heart——

"Oh, please, not *that*," said Hildegarde.

Richard turned the dial and got the news.

Black Beard was reported still in Texas and three plane-loads of G men were flying to the scene. J. Edgar Hoover was already there and in personal charge of everything. They were going to get the bandit this time.

There was nothing new on the Littlejohn case respecting Littlejohn, himself, who continued to be missing. But war had broken out in the T.P. (tooth paste) Division of the C.I.O. A mass meeting had been held and the conservative element, representing an overwhelming majority of Rosydent employees, declared that they had been misled by communist agitators. They were now purging their ranks of suspected reds, and it was anticipated that they would all soon be back at work. Patrick groaned and held his head. The radio went on:

Mr. Harrison Hemlock of Hemlock, Hemlock & Hemlock, counsel for the Rosydent company, was reported to be in Washington where he had had a conference with Secretary Morgenthau regarding certain income-tax liabilities. It was thought that a settlement of this matter was about to be arranged. President Roosevelt had sent a telegram of condolence to Mrs. Littlejohn . . .

"There! You see!" cried Patrick. He turned his head. One eye was black and swollen shut. "I told you so! And I've heard enough of that stuff." He reached out and cut the switch and slumped down in his seat, complaining bitterly: "No guts—no guts—no guts——"

Mr. Littlejohn fancied he could see the gloating smile on Richard's face through the back of his head. Silence settled thickly down again. Even Hildegarde seemed moody and distrait. He smoked a pipe and then got out his mouth organ. After romping through "Home Sweet Home" and the "Suwanee River" he worked for a long time on the "Rhapsody in Blue." It was hard and the rhythm very tricky, but he thought that he was getting it. After this he dozed. It was dusk when he

awoke and they were passing through a city. Richard said that it was Indianapolis.

He looked about with interest. They were on a busy shopping street with glowing neon lights and windows filled with everything: soap and soup, drugs and dress, boots and beer, blah and blah . . . But what was this?—a mammoth window dressed with snow and icebergs; and gracefully grouped about in this pretty polar scene were some chromium-faced ladies wearing coats. Above the window a writhing purple sign proclaimed: "Klein's Glass Block New York Store."

"Stop," commanded Mr. Littlejohn.

Richard applied the brakes and pulled up at the curb, and a negro in an admiral's uniform opened the door for them. Mr. Littlejohn stepped out and motioned Hildegarde to follow him.

"Hildegarde and I have some business to attend to."

"Very good, sir," muttered Richard stiffly, and he leaned across Patrick and pressed a folded paper into his employer's hand. "To be read at your convenience——"

"You *are* a dear," said Hildegarde as she slipped her arm through his.

Mr. Klein was waiting for them just inside the door. He was a short and unctuous man with a very toothy smile. He greeted them effusively but he had never in his life received a customer arrayed like Mr. Littlejohn and there was a trace of apprehension in his heart which was reflected in his eye.

"We are on a hunting trip," Mr. Littlejohn explained.

"Ah!" beamed Mr. Klein. "Ducks?"

"No," said Mr. Littlejohn. "Truth."

Mr. Klein laughed heartily. He had peeked out of the window and seen the New York license plate and a man who appeared to be a chauffeur. These were probably people of importance. He rubbed his hands and showed his teeth which were very white and regular. He said that if truth were to be found at all, it would be in Indianapolis, and preferably in Klein's Glass

Block New York Store which guaranteed everything it sold to be as represented.

"A-1 merchandise, that's all we handle, sir. And may I ask your pleasure?"

Mr. Littlejohn said that they were looking for a coat to replace the one which the young lady was carrying on her arm and which had been stained with oil. "A smart, good-looking coat," he added.

Mr. Klein sighed sympathetically. He said that oil was very treacherous stuff, and he took the coat from Hildegarde and turned it carelessly to see the label underneath the collar. It was a Bergdorf Goodman. His pulse stepped up a notch and saliva gathered in his mouth. These were certainly people of importance. He led them to the elevator and said that Mrs. Bloomberg would attend them on the second floor, and he would join them presently, himself. Then he ran to a telephone and told Mrs. Bloomberg pretty sharply that she should watch her step.

On the way up in the elevator Mr. Littlejohn glanced at the paper which Richard had put into his hand, and read:

Dear sir:

Circumstances over which I have no control, compel me to tender my resignation to take effect immediately. I cannot preserve my integrity in the present situation nor restrain myself from violence. I regret that my wedding must be indefinitely postponed.

Yours respectfully
Richard Pettingill

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn and put the paper in his pocket.

Mrs. Bloomberg was waiting for them in a quiver of excitement. She was a stout and breathless woman, and Mr. Klein had made it clear that she'd better make a sale.

"Please be seated, modom." She ushered them to a settee. "Mr. Klein has telephoned. A coat, I think he said——"

Mr. Littlejohn looked about. The room was large and there was not another customer in sight. He suggested that perhaps they had come at too late an hour.

"Too late?" Mrs. Bloomberg laughed hysterically. "Dear sir and modom, Klein's is here to serve you. Our time is yours." She raised her voice and called, "Yvette!"

A tall, blond, sulky-looking girl came from behind a screen and slowly paced the room with one hand on her hip and the other one held out as if for alms. She had on an evening gown and a long chinchilla wrap.

"Very rich—" breathed Mrs. Bloomberg.

"Very," Mr. Littlejohn agreed. "But not quite the thing for touring."

"For—touring?" It was crushing but she put a brave front on it. "Dear sir and modom, Mr. Klein did not explain. Why certainly for touring it would not be—*comme il faut*. But we have the very thing."

She whispered instructions to Yvette who slouched away with an air of surly indolence. If modom would be patient for one moment she would see a Paris model selected by Mr. Klein, himself—a real creation, faultlessly adapted to modom's personality and taste. She wheezed along at random. Her husband was an invalid and his dinner would be late, and she thought she felt her asthma coming on.

Yvette returned in a leopard coat with bands of monkey fur.

"*Pour le sport*—" Mrs. Bloomberg murmured hopefully.

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn.

"But I don't want a *fur* coat," cried Hildegarde impatiently.

"Not a *fur* coat?" Mrs. Bloomberg could not repress a shudder.

"Certainly not."

"But—just a little on the collar?"

"Not a hair."

"Oh—modom ——"

"I want a simple little sport coat."

"But, modom—leopard is so simple and so smart."

"No, no, no." Hildegarde stood up. "We really haven't time ——"

Mr. Klein suddenly appeared and took in the situation at a glance. Fur?—Certainly not. The idea was ridiculous.

"Mrs. Bloomberg, if you please—" He looked at her and sent shivers down her spine. "Permit me to take charge of this, myself. A simple little sport coat. We have exactly what you wish. Yvette! The English tweeds. Be quick!" Yvette moved almost hastily. "I am very sorry you have been delayed." And he scowled at Mrs. Bloomberg who was leaning on a chair. "Such things would not arise if I could be everywhere at once, but that is quite impossible. I presume you find it so in your own business, sir." He rubbed his hands and showed his teeth.

Mr. Littlejohn was about to assent to this general indictment of human frailty when Yvette reappeared in a tweed sport coat which looked distinctly possible.

"Our Piccadilly Promenader," Mr. Klein announced with an air of careless triumph, then in a confidential tone, "I understand on good authority that the Duchess of Windsor has this model in her wardrobe."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn.

"It's rather nice," said Hildegarde squinting at it critically. "But what makes it bulge in front?"

"Bulge?" Mr. Klein was startled and he stared hard at Yvette who promptly turned her back. "Bulge?"

"Yes, *bulge*," repeated Hildegarde.

"Perhaps—the belt—" faltered Mrs. Bloomberg.

"Oh, yes! The belt. Well certainly. Fasten the belt, Yvette." Yvette obeyed this order slowly and reluctantly but continued to display her back.

"There!" smiled Mr. Klein. "It was the belt."

"The bulge," insisted Hildegarde, "was in the *front*."

"In the front? Oh, in the *front*!" He laughed indulgently. "Yvette, kindly face this way." Yvette shuffled her feet and moved about four inches. He raised his voice. "Yvette! Kindly pay attention. I said for you to turn around."

"Okay," muttered the girl and swished about defiantly with a sullen, scowling face.

"There now—" Mr. Klein began, but the words died in his throat.

"You see?" said Hildegarde. "It's much worse—with the belt."

It was worse—much worse. It was incredible. For a moment he was speechless. He glared at Yvette and rubbed his sweating hands.

"It looks," Mr. Littlejohn suggested mildly, "like a lump."

Like a lump! Mr. Klein shuddered but pulled himself together. "Mrs. Bloomberg," he said between his teeth, "what is the matter with that coat?"

"Why—why—" the unfortunate woman stammered, "I don't know, Mr. Klein."

"You don't know, Mrs. Bloomberg? Are you in charge of this department?" Mrs. Bloomberg made a choking sound. "Well, perhaps you will be good enough to find out right away."

"Yes, sir. Oh, yes, sir." She tottered forward and knelt beside Yvette, loosened the belt and tried to pull the coat down. The bulge remained. She tried to smooth it with her hands and then to push it in . . .

"Lay off that, you old fool," said Yvette beneath her breath.

Mrs. Bloomberg's eyes were wide with horror as she climbed back to her feet.

"Well?" snapped Mr. Klein.

"Yes, sir—" She moistened her dry lips. "It—it's not the coat, sir."

"*What?*"

"No, sir. It's—Yvette ——"

"*Yvette?*"

"Yes, sir. You see—" She choked and sank faintly in a chair.

"But—*what* ——"

"It's me," Yvette said suddenly in a hard, flat voice. "It's me. I'm going to have a baby, see? That's all." She jerked off the

coat and threw it on the floor. "Now you can give my lousy job to someone else." And she tossed her head and flung out of the room.

Mr. Klein was livid. He stared at Mrs. Bloomberg with a withering eye and said in a hoarse, unnatural voice: "So? A model with a baby!"

Mrs. Bloomberg hung her head and moaned that she didn't see how such a thing could happen.

"You are asking *me*?" Mr. Klein demanded.

"Oh, no, sir. I didn't mean—" She stoped abruptly.

"Indeed?" Mr. Klein was trembling. "What is it that you *didn't mean*?"

"Nothing, sir. Nothing——"

"Then do me the favor to be silent, Mrs. Bloomberg." He took out his handkerchief and wiped his dripping face.

Mr. Littlejohn felt very much embarrassed. He murmured that, as it was very late, perhaps it would be best to postpone the matter till another day.

"Wait a bit," said Hildegarde, and she picked up the coat and slipped it on. "It's rather nice, you know——"

Mr. Klein revived as if by magic. He backed away and closed one eye and sighed ecstatically that his Piccadilly Promenader had never been displayed to such advantage.

"So chic—" breathed Mrs. Bloomberg.

"And fitting like a glove," added Mr. Klein.

"No bulge at all—" ventured Mrs. Bloomberg.

Mr. Klein gave her a dirty look. "No bulge. Well certainly—of course. Ha! Ha!"

"Not *yet*," smiled Hildegarde posing before the mirror. She looked very trim and smart.

Mr. Littlejohn was blushing. He said hastily that they would take the coat and that his *niece* would wear it.

"You are a *dear*," cried Hildegarde, and she threw her arms around his neck and kissed him on the forehead.

Everyone laughed lightheartedly and Mrs. Bloomberg went

to get the change. Mr. Klein kept the conversation going. He spoke of the problems of the *couturier*. There was this matter of the mannequins or models. A layman would really be surprised at how much they were paid and how difficult they were to find. What with bathing beauty contests and the moving pictures there was a dangerous shortage in supply. And the best were not too satisfactory. To be sure they had figures and sometimes they had faces, but the simple truth was that they were not *ladies*.

"It makes all the difference in the world." He rubbed his hands and showed his teeth. "For example, if I had in my establishment a young lady like your niece to display the Klein creations, I would guarantee to double up my sales."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn and he felt in his pocket for Richard's note of resignation.

Hildegarde laughed lightly. "How much would you pay?"

Mr. Littlejohn put the paper in her hand.

"Well—" Mr. Klein hesitated. Even in jest some things were sacred. "To *you*, miss—forty dollars a week." He chuckled. "I suppose that seems like nothing in your life."

"No—" Hildegarde said vaguely. She was reading the note with a wrinkle in her brow.

Mr. Klein walked with them to the elevator. He said that it had been a great pleasure to receive them in his store and he hoped that they would come again. If they had friends who might be traveling west—perhaps they would be good enough to mention Klein's . . .

"About that job—" said Hildegarde abruptly.

"Job?"

"Yes. Forty a week I think you said."

"Oh!—Oh, yes!" He laughed indulgently.

"I'll take it."

"What?"

"I'll be here at nine o'clock tomorrow morning."

"You—you are joking, miss."

"No, I'm not." She looked him in the eye and added lightly, "I think it might be fun—just for a lark."

"But—" He looked for Mr. Littlejohn who had stepped into the elevator.

"I believe that I can qualify," Hildegarde went on. "I've got a figure and a face, and—I'm a member of the Junior League, and the daughter of a Wall Street banker."

"Oh, Miss—" Junior League—daughter of a Wall Street banker . . . His face began to sweat again and his knees felt loose and wobbly.

Hildegarde stepped into the elevator but checked the closing of the door. "Oh, by the way, that old coat of mine is an exclusive model——"

"Yes, I—I know," he stammered.

"We'll copy it," said Hildegarde. "It ought to be a knockout in this town." Mr. Klein dared not trust himself to speak but his teeth responded eagerly. She smiled. "Tomorrow then, at nine—" The elevator started down. She slipped her arm through Mr. Littlejohn's and looked up into his face a little doubtfully. "I'm not going home to father, and I'm going to be married before twelve o'clock tomorrow. Do you think I'm crazy?"

"No," said Mr. Littlejohn.

"Thanks." She sighed contentedly. "You've got to take things in your stride, the way they come. That makes life fun. And if it isn't fun—*what is it?*"

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. He turned the question slowly in his mind. If it wasn't fun—*what was it?*

"Couldn't you stay here?" asked Hildegarde impulsively.

"Stay here?"

"I mean, with us?—and look for what you're looking for?"

"I'm afraid not."

"But I don't like to have you go. You—you seem to understand so much—" Her fingers tightened on his arm. "And—I'm really very fond of you."

Mr. Littlejohn was fifty-five years old. His hair was gone and his black mustache was false, but something twisted in his heart and he felt a sudden craving for youth and love and romance.

"When you begin to *need* someone," he said, "it is time to say good-by." He smiled but he was startled at the idea.

"Well—perhaps—" Hildegarde assented doubtfully.

They crossed the store and came out into the street. There was quite a crowd around the car. Patrick was sitting on the curb with the colored doorman's handkerchief pressed to his nose, and Richard was leaning on the radiator explaining something to an officer. One of his eyes was black and almost shut.

"But there was no fight, I tell you. We were sitting in the car and, when I wasn't looking, he hit me in the eye."

"Yeah?—But what did *you* do?"

"Nothing—up to that time."

"Yeah?" The officer looked doubtfully at Patrick.

Mr. Littlejohn stepped forward to adjust the situation. He said the car was his and the two boys were his nephews who were actually the best of friends but inclined to be too playful. The officer was easily mollified. He laughingly agreed that boys would be boys, accepted a cigar and went away.

Farewells were quickly said. Mr. Littlejohn kissed Hildegarde and felt again a twist inside his heart. He was anxious to be gone. Patrick, with a bloody nose but a grin of exultation, climbed into the driver's seat, and they were off.

"Good luck," called Hildegarde.

Mr. Littlejohn leaned out and waved his hand. The thought flashed through his mind that he would never see this girl again—never as he saw her now—the trim, slight figure, and the laughing eyes—nor hear her voice—nor feel her fingers on his arm. Through all the eons of eternity it would not be again. And he sensed, for one brief instant, the whole vast agony of human partings.

Yes—well . . . He leaned back in the corner with a sigh. When you began to *need* someone, it was time to say—good-by.

V

"NOW YOU GOT A *DRIVER*," PATRICK said.

He dodged through traffic for a block or two and pulled up with a flourish in front of a large building which was blazing with light and from which came dismal gusts of jazz.

Mr. Littlejohn looked out and shuddered. "Why are we stopping here?" he asked.

"It's a swell hotel," said Patrick. "Just the place to spend the night. I found out from the nigger at the store." And he started to get out.

"There is nothing to be learned in such a place," Mr. Littlejohn protested. "And I prefer to travel on into the country."

Patrick argued warmly. He said that it was late and there must be some limit to hours of human labor even for a chauffeur; that he only had one driving eye, the other being shut, and to continue further was a risky undertaking; that he was tired and hungry; and anyway he was fed up with lousy auto camps.

But Mr. Littlejohn was not to be persuaded.

"Well, can't we even eat here?"

Mr. Littlejohn shook his head and pointed sternly to the west.

The neon lights thinned out and presently the city vanished like an evil dream behind him. He breathed again. The night was fine and dark, and like a warm soft blanket it enveloped him in thick protecting blackness. It was easier to be alone when you were in the dark. The darkness swallowed everything, and even you, yourself, became somehow a part of it. He sniffed

the air and caught the damp sweet scent of earth. Frogs chanted in the ditch beside the road, an owl hooted from a passing tree, a dog barked in the distance. The night was filled with sound. Life went right on at night, and you were closer to it in the dark, and even more aware of it. If you were very still you could feel the rhythm of it in yourself. It would be good, he thought, to lie down on the ground and put your arms around it. He smiled at the idea and was surprised to find that his loneliness was gone. Where had it gone?—and why? He pondered earnestly. Could it be that there was no room for loneliness—in *life*? Hum . . .

Patrick stopped at an auto camp on Highway 36. It was called "The Hawaiian Tourists' Rest." Hula skirts, dangling from the ceiling, obscured the light, and the walls were lined with crumbling bark inhabited by spiders. A melancholy-looking man in a dirty cap and apron with a lei of faded artificial flowers hung around his neck, came out of the kitchen. He said it was pretty late for supper but they could have corn beef and cabbage.

Patrick put a nickel in a slot machine and caught a winning hand, but his winnings didn't drop. He complained bitterly because it didn't work. The man gave him back his nickel and said that nothing worked so what the hell.

"But I've been gypped," said Patrick.

"Sure," said the man. "That's what they're for." He went into the kitchen and came back with a tray of food. His arms were bare and tattooed to the shoulders with ships and bleeding hearts and mermaids.

"I suspect," ventured Mr. Littlejohn, "that you have been a sailor."

"That's right," replied the man. "I was in the navy twenty years." He slopped two mugs of coffee on the table, pulled up another chair and sat down between his guests. "Twenty years, brother. I been everywhere in my time—Panama, Honolulu, China. I been clean around the world. I can shut my eyes and

see the palm trees on the beach, and feel the rolling of the ship, and smell the salt. Or I'm riding in a rickshaw, see?—with those babies in kimonos blinking at me from the sidewalk. I been in Algiers and Marseilles, in Rio and in Sydney. Oh, I been around a bit!" He laughed.

Mr. Littlejohn observed that Indiana was a long way from the sea.

"Jesus, I'll say it is! You're telling me!" He was silent for a moment. "I was a bosun when I quit. And all those twenty years I'd been waiting for the day—the day I'd walk the gangplank with the money that I'd saved. Oh, I was a careful guy! I watched my change. I might be sitting with a gang in a café in Shanghai or any other place, lapping a bowl of suds or dancing with some skirt that I'd picked up, but always I was thinking of the day when I'd have my little pile and I'd be free—*free*." He laughed again, harshly and bitterly. "Yeah, I was one of those guys."

"Free?—for what?" asked Mr. Littlejohn.

"You'd like to know that, wouldn't you? Well, by God, so would I."

"There's a spider in my coffee," Patrick said.

The man refilled the mug and slopped it down. "I was born here—on a farm—up the road a piece—" He seemed to drift away into his thoughts.

"Yes?" prompted Mr. Littlejohn.

"Well, I always thought I wanted to come back some time, marry a home-town girl and settle down. I thought that thing for twenty years. I never thought of nothing else. I might be sleeping with some jane or riding a surf board on the beach at Waikiki, but I was *thinking* that. I had a swell time, see? But I never knew I did because I always wanted something else." He paused and added doubtfully, "Maybe you don't know what I mean——"

"Yes," said Mr. Littlejohn, "I do."

"Well, I came back—that's all—married the home-town girl

and settled down—" He shrugged and glanced about the room with an expression of aversion. "I used to think about the kind of place I'd have when I came home—something different like, with a lot of new ideas I'd picked up in foreign countries." He laughed and spread his arms out on the table:—the ships and bleeding hearts and mermaids. "Well, brother, here it is! But it's *not* what I thought, and it's *not* what I wanted. And that's that." Somewhere in the back part of the house a baby began to cry. He got up listlessly and wearily. "That's my youngest kid. I got to heat his bottle."

A woman's voice called petulantly: "Joe!"

"That's my wife." As he disappeared into the kitchen he shouted irritably, "Keep your shirt on, can't you!"

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn, pushing back his empty plate.

"The guy is nuts," said Patrick. "The spiders have got into his head." And he flicked one from his cuff.

Mr. Littlejohn smiled thoughtfully. He said that to dispose of human problems with psychopathic formulae was a very common practice, but it did not answer anything at all. He paused and added slowly:

"I should say this man was—dead."

"Dead?" Patrick stared at his employer with his one good eye.

"Yes, dead," repeated Mr. Littlejohn. "For observe, Patrick, by his own admission, he spent twenty years living in a future which could never come to pass, and he now lives in a past which has never been at all; so that, whether dead or living in a biologic sense, he is unquestionably dead to the *living part* of life which is neither in the future nor the past but only in that moment which is—*now*."

"I don't get that stuff." Patrick shook his head.

"No—" sighed Mr. Littlejohn. "I am not sure that I do, myself." He was silent for a moment and then suddenly demanded: "Patrick, is your life—*fun*?"

Patrick choked and dropped his knife. "Fun? Did you say *fun*?"

"Yes, *fun.* And if it isn't fun—*what is it?*"

"It's hell," said Patrick bitterly. And how could life be fun in a capitalistic system?—except for a handful of economic royalists, bone-crushing pirates who sat astraddle of the world and ground their fellow men into the dust! He tried to curl his lip but it was cut and swollen. Fun? He should say it wasn't. But life *could* be fun. Look at Russia!

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn.

Patrick hedged a little. Perhaps not at the moment. One couldn't turn the whole world upside down and get everything adjusted overnight. That was too much to expect. The capitalistic countries and their stinking bourgeoisie were causing all the trouble and delay. But the period of *fun* might begin at any instant. It was just around the corner.

Mr. Littlejohn could not repress a shudder at this phrase which revived unpleasant memories.

"Yes," thundered Patrick, banging the table with his fist, "life *can* be fun—when social barriers are leveled to the ground, when the ruling class is liquidated, when we have a universal five-year plan."

"I—I wonder—" murmured Mr. Littlejohn.

"That's the trouble with your kind. You wonder all your lives and never have the guts to take a step. Hoarding up your pennies, hanging on the coat tails of the rich, waiting for the day when you'll be big shots too like Horatio Littlejohn——"

"Oh, no—" gasped Mr. Littlejohn.

But Patrick cut him short. "Sure. I know your kind—the petty bourgeois riffraff of the system. No ideology, no solidarity, no brains or guts. Well, let me tell you something: you're just another sucker on a treadmill." Mr. Littlejohn moved uncomfortably. "That hits a soft spot, eh?" He pulled a dog-eared pamphlet from his pocket and flung it on the table. "Read that and get the low-down on yourself!"

A frowzy looking woman in a dirty dressing gown came in from the kitchen. She said ungraciously that they would have

to stop the noise which was waking up the children. Mr. Littlejohn apologized and added that, as it was growing late, he would be glad to be shown to his room. He bid good night to Patrick and, taking the pamphlet with him, followed the woman through a sort of chicken yard to a small cabin which was also lined with bark and had a peculiar musty smell.

"There seems to be an odor—" he suggested mildly.

"It's spiders," said the woman, lighting a hula-skirted lamp beside the bed. "But they won't bother you if you don't bother them."

"Hum—" He looked at her closely and thought that not very long ago she had been young and pretty. Something creaked alarmingly above him and he glanced up with a start of apprehension.

"That's the termites working in the roof," she said. "You don't never see them but they're there."

"I—I expect when you get used to them—" Mr. Littlejohn smiled nervously.

"Yes." Her voice was empty of expression but there was something in her eyes that sent shivers down his spine. "You can get used to anything, I guess." And she turned on her heel and left the room.

Mr. Littlejohn got into bed as rapidly as possible and, when he had ascertained that there were no spiders underneath his pillow, settled himself comfortably and opened Patrick's pamphlet which was titled: "Program of the Communist International."

He read for some time earnestly. The pamphlet set forth clearly how to communize the world, but nowhere could he find what seemed to be a guarantee of *fun.* There was promise of security in an economic sense which would no doubt be a boon to all mankind. But would it make life *fun*?—and if it wasn't fun, *what was it?*

He laid the book aside and pondered drowsily. Class distinctions might be leveled to the ground and political structures disappear; production might be a function of the state and

economy so planned that every human being had a job and the wherewithal to live in decent comfort; old age and disability might be provided for and one might travel safely on a straight, well-guarded track from the cradle to the grave; but—*would it be fun?*

He thought of Sam, the rough, young man who built the bridge across the Golden Gate. What good would it do him? And the sour, lonely woman in the auto camp. What could she get out of it? And the boy and girl with their heads so close together in the yellow flare of oil . . . It didn't answer that. And the sailor with the mermaids on his arms. He would still be living in that past which had never been at all, while the spiders spun their webs about his house and the termites worked away to tear it down. And he, Horatio Littlejohn, himself—would it solve the enigma of his life? He sighed and shook his head, and said aloud:

"The enigma of human life cannot be resolved with a social or economic formula."

He turned off the light beneath the hula skirt and composed himself to sleep. Termites were communists and older than mankind by a hundred million years. He had read about them somewhere. Well, they should have learned something in that time. But the spider was a rugged individualist who lived alone and liked it. He wrapped the sheet around his head with just a crack to breathe through. It was curious to think of all these creatures with their different social theories and political philosophies, all living here about him in this room. How did things go with them?—and was it *fun?* It would be interesting if one knew . . .

He fell into a troubled sleep and dreamed that he was in a termite city. Patrick was his guide. They passed a regiment of soldiers whose heads combined the properties of flame throwers and gas masks. Their aspect was both hideous and alarming, and Mr. Littlejohn commented on the fact.

"They're very dangerous," Patrick said. "You see, they're blind."

"Blind?"

"Completely. It has distinct advantages. For example, in battle they never know which way to retreat and are therefore just as likely to advance."

"Dear me—" said Mr. Littlejohn. He turned the matter in his mind but could make nothing of it.

"They're sexless too," Patrick added carelessly.

Mr. Littlejohn was so astounded that he could not, at the moment, think of anything to say. They turned a corner and came into a broad thoroughfare which was alive with hurrying termites all marching in the same direction. Their pale, pinched faces were empty of expression, their clothing drab and shabby, and they all looked just alike. So closely were they packed that it was impossible to stop or change one's pace, and Mr. Littlejohn was swept along until he was quite breathless.

"Where are they all going?" he inquired.

"To work," said Patrick shortly. "Where else would they go?"

Mr. Littlejohn felt horribly depressed. He looked about and noted that the workers were not talking to each other. Indeed, except for the shuffling tramp of feet, there did not appear to be a sound. He asked Patrick why they were so silent.

"What is there to talk about?" replied his guide. "Everything was said in the age of individualism."

"I—I beg your pardon—" Mr. Littlejohn thought he had misunderstood.

"When things are settled—" Patrick shrugged, "there is nothing more to say."

"But, er, cultural matters—" stammered Mr. Littlejohn.

Patrick laughed. "We got through with that stuff forty million years ago. It took up too much time."

"But—I thought that's what the whole idea was for."

"Nonsense!" snapped Patrick. "The idea is *production*." And

he went on to explain rather irritably that the spiders were always raising hell with sabotage or something, and in consequence of this and numerous other factors they had fallen way behind on their fifteenth "Million-Year Plan" and obviously had had to speed things up.

"But—the unfortunate workers——"

"Unfortunate—hell!" Patrick interrupted. "They're doing fine. They've got *security*." He shrugged again. "And anyway, they're blind and sexless."

"Blind?—and sexless?" gasped Mr. Littlejohn.

"Certainly."

"But *why*?"

"It keeps their minds on work," Patrick said impatiently. "Don't you see?—they've got nothing else to think about."

"Good heavens!" Mr. Littlejohn felt faint and dizzy. A horrible suspicion crossed his mind and he stole a look at Patrick from the corner of his eye. "But—you——"

"Yes," scowled Patrick, "I'm blind and sexless too, and I don't want any cracks about it either."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. He was silent for some time and then ventured to suggest that, in the circumstances, there could not be any babies.

"Rubbish!" said Patrick. "We make babies by the carload. Synthetic impregnation eugenically devised. It's marvelous what we have done in sixty million years." He spoke so loudly and defiantly that passing termites turned their heads. "It's stupendous. It's colossal."

"Yes—" sighed Mr. Littlejohn, "it is." He paused and turned the matter in his mind. "But—is it *fun*, Patrick?"

"Fun?" Patrick started violently. "Did you say—*fun?*"

"Yes, *fun*," repeated Mr. Littlejohn.

"Shh!" Patrick looked cautiously around. There was not a soul in sight. He considered craftily, then drew close to Mr. Littlejohn and whispered very softly in his ear: "Confidentially—it's *hell*."

No sooner had the words issued from his lips than there was a blinding flash of light, and out of it a great voice thundered: "*TREASON!*" It rolled and echoed in the sky: "*TREASON! Treason! Treason . . .*"

Mr. Littlejohn sat up in bed and rubbed his eyes. A large black spider was swinging idly back and forth close to his face and regarding him with an air of accusation.

"I—I'm very sorry," he apologized. But without a word the spider turned its back and ascended slowly toward the ceiling. "Hum—" He sighed and looked about and was suddenly aware that it was all a dream.

The sun was high and shining brightly through the open window. He could see the golden foliage of a sycamore. A rooster crowed; a dog barked; a child cried plaintively. Life was going right along. He stumbled to the window and looked out. There was the car and Patrick sitting in it, apparently asleep. Yes, it was all a dream.

But just what was a *dream*? He combed his mustache thoughtfully. Nobody really knew. Perhaps you *did* go places in your sleep—some living part of you into some other part of life. He looked up at the rafters and the cobwebs. He could almost have reached them with his hand, and yet . . . Space was a strange and flexible affair whose boundaries depended on who measured it. It was like time. You fixed it up to suit yourself, but if you stepped outside that little part of life in which you lived—what was it then?

He shook a spider from his shoe. If you shut your eyes, time and space were gone, and you could travel anywhere you pleased, as fast as light or faster. And you could see things you had never seen, could never see with eyes. That was what happened in your dreams. But were they real, these things you saw? Perhaps they were—more real than the distorted images reflected in your eyes which, his oculist had told him, really saw things upside down. He folded his pajamas and packed them in the pocket made for ducks. What was real and what

was not? It was difficult to say. He paused at the door to look back at the sagging roof and rotten bark-lined walls; and he closed his eyes and saw once more the shabby throngs of blind and sexless termites shuffling through the silent streets.

The tattooed sailor was leaning on the lunch counter reading the morning paper. He said: "I see where they got Black Beard cornered in a farmhouse down near Amarillo, Texas."

Mr. Littlejohn felt shocked and grieved. Poor Black Beard! The lone wolf backed against the wall at last. It was too bad. He sighed and ordered buckwheat cakes and sausage.

The sailor went on talking from the kitchen. He said that the Rosydent corporation had strung a private wire all the way from Amarillo to the barn behind the farmhouse where Black Beard was trapped, and they had microphones all around the place and were going to broadcast everything that happened. They were pretty smart, that outfit, to cash in on a man hunt. Everybody in the country would be listening in on that. You would even hear the pop of the machine guns when the G men started going. Black Beard would be killed of course. All the G men in the country couldn't take that guy alive.

He brought the buckwheat cakes and slopped some coffee in a mug. Then he looked inside the paper and said there was no news of Littlejohn who probably was dead. He laughed unpleasantly and added that God would have a problem on his hands with Littlejohn and Black Beard both up there at the same time.

Mr. Littlejohn was not paying attention. He fished a spider from the syrup jug and ate his cakes in silence. The roof creaked sharply and he shuddered and looked up.

"I should think you could get rid of them," he ventured.

"Rid of who?"

"I—I mean the termites——"

"Oh, them!" The sailor pondered darkly for a moment and shook his head. "No. Why should I? They belong here and I

don't." He kicked the counter and a chunk of bark fell off. "It's just the place for them, and they can have it."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn.

As he went out the door a child began to cry and a woman's voice called petulantly: "Joe!"

Patrick was fast asleep and grumbled bitterly on being roused. He said that he had been awake all night fighting spiders. There was a big lump on his cheek, and he said there were others on his feet and on his seat. It was painful to walk or to sit down. He was cold and hungry too, but he would sooner starve to death than eat another bite in that spider-ridden man trap. And he started up the car and swung onto the highway.

The day was clear and fine; green hills billowed away into the morning haze; smoke curled lazily from the farmhouses. Here and there a plow was turning up the rich black soil which looked good enough to eat. A flock of crows cawed hoarsely from a cornfield; a rabbit ran across the road. The whole world was alive, and life was beautiful and wonderful.

Mr. Littlejohn looked out upon the pleasant scene and meditated comfortably: If you could just be *constantly* aware of *life*—not from some angle of your own, not from that narrow cell where you were chained as an observer, but free to melt into the common sea, to be an undivided part of it. And there were moments when you were, moments of ecstasy—of love, of grief, of many other things—a bar of music, a line of verse, a picture or a spoken word, the color of a sunset or a leaf—moments when you forgot that gnawing sense of isolated *self*, when it was stunned or shocked or lulled to sleep, and then you *really lived.* Life opened wide its doors and took you in. Hum —yes . . .

If you could get your toe into the crack and block that tricky door so that it could not close and shut you out—or find a key that turned the formidable lock . . . Yes, a key. That would be even better. Some people did have keys; you could see it in their eyes. But what sort of keys? Churches tried to

answer things like that but they failed to make it clear. And the people with the keys had no blueprints that were practical. They filled enormous books with their ideas but it seemed, in the long run, that their own keys only fitted their own locks. Was there any universal formula? Perhaps if you were constantly—*in love* . . . Yes, but in love with *what*? He scrutinized this question for some time but could not find any answer.

Hitchhikers with eager smiling faces thumbed hopefully but Patrick would not stop. He said it didn't pay to take a chance and maybe pick a thief or some guy with the smallpox. You could catch anything that way. And if you had an accident and scratched one of those birds they would get a shyster lawyer and trim you to the skin.

"If everyone were so disposed," Mr. Littlejohn replied, "you would be walking, Patrick."

That was different, Patrick said, and anyway he had no time to waste.

"But I am in no hurry."

"I am," said Patrick briefly.

They passed through Decatur, Illinois, and overtook a long line of slowly moving cars. Patrick fumed at the delay, tried to pass and was forced into the line, scraping fenders with the car behind which grudgingly held back.

"It's like going to a funeral," he complained.

"I suspect that is the case," said Mr. Littlejohn. He looked back and saw some men in American Legion caps. They were leaning from the windows of their car, and shouting angrily and making threatening gestures.

"They are drunk," said Patrick scornfully.

"That may be," Mr. Littlejohn admitted. "But the fact remains that we are intruding in a ceremony in which we have no part, and I suggest that we extricate ourselves as rapidly as possible."

"Don't worry," Patrick snapped, and he jerked out of the line just in time to miss an empty whisky bottle which one of

the legionaries hurled. And with this spurt he got in behind the hearse.

"We are now," sighed Mr. Littlejohn, "in the position of chief mourners." He looked back anxiously and was relieved to find that the following car did not seem to be aware that anything unusual had occurred.

Patrick dodged back and forth but the traffic was heavy and he could not get away. He said with bitterness that the American Legion was a gang of fascist nitwits . . .

Mr. Littlejohn turned this matter in his mind. Could these rough and ready veterans be disposed of with a formula? Men who had fought and died—or fought and bled at least, for the honor of their country. They had known the battlefield and presumably had learned the futility of war—the stupidity of violence . . .

"Swell!" exulted Patrick as the hearse turned in at the gate of a small cemetery. "We stayed with him to the end and the next thing is to find a place to eat." He stepped on the accelerator for a stretch of several miles and pulled up at a combination gas station and lunch counter.

As Mr. Littlejohn was getting out, another car drove up behind him. There was something vaguely familiar about its appearance but he did not look too closely and, following Patrick into the lunchroom, he sat down at the counter and ordered a hamburger with chili beans and coffee. Then he glanced out of the window and observed that several more cars had arrived and some men in legionary caps appeared to be in conference with the boy who ran the gas station.

Patrick had just finished ordering a substantial repast when the boy came into the room and, addressing himself to Mr. Littlejohn, said doubtfully:

"There's a gang of mourners out there looking for a funeral." Mr. Littlejohn sipped his coffee and said nothing. "They say they were following your Chevrolet which was right behind the hearse."

"They followed the wrong wagon," chuckled Patrick. "And their corpse is back about five miles."

At this point six burly legionaries came into the lunchroom and a strong odor of liquor came in with them. One of them pointed at Patrick.

"That's the guy."

"Butting into funerals," snarled another.

Patrick stood up and backed against the counter. "Can I help it if you're soused and don't know where you're going?" He was pale but defiant.

"We'll teach you to respect the dead," growled the biggest of the six, and he hit Patrick in the face and knocked him down. A fourth man kicked him in the ribs, and the last two picked him up and threw him out into the road.

"We'd ought to lynch him," the first man suggested.

"Hell, no!" the big one objected. "We got no time. We got to hurry back and bury John."

"But what about *this* guy?" said another, staring hard at Mr. Littlejohn.

"Leave him be!"

"But can't we even fan him?"

"We got no time." He strode out of the room with the others at his back. The last one to leave pulled Mr. Littlejohn's cap over his eyes and emptied the contents of the salt cellar into his coffee cup.

"Drink that, you dirty red!" He kicked Mr. Littlejohn's stool from under him, thumbed his nose at the counter man, banged the door and broke a pane of glass.

Mr. Littlejohn rose from the floor and released his cap from his eyes. The counter man was staring moodily at the broken glass.

"Them guys that went to war," he sighed, "ain't never gotten over it."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. He felt shaken and confused. Contrary to his theory these warriors had not learned the

stupidity of violence, and perhaps it did not work that way at all.

"I presume," he said half to himself, "that the warlike attitude becomes a habit."

"War—hell!" the counter man replied. "I know them guys, and they never got no closer to the war than Camp Grant, Illinois."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn again. Well, the warlike attitude must consist of something else which had nothing to do with war at all. He wrapped his hamburger in a paper napkin, paid his check and went outside.

Patrick was sitting on the ground with his back against the gas pump. His good eye was now shut but the other one was open just a crack. He said he was not hungry and refused the proffered hamburger. Then he got to his feet and climbed into the car.

"It's a swell social order," he said bitterly, "when you have to be dead to be respected." And he slammed the gear shift lever and drove off.

Mr. Littlejohn ate his hamburger thoughtfully. Respect for the dead was a good and proper thing, but also very easy. The dead would never trouble you again. They were no longer competition and you could afford to be indulgent. There was also an element of biologic victory in surviving your enemies or friends—a sense of being winner in a race, though actually of course the dead might be ahead.

But respect for the living was a very different thing. They were right there on the track, sprinting past or getting in your way, tripping you up or stepping on your toes, blinding you with dust, splashing you with mud, clinging to your coat tails . . . Yes, it was easy to forgive the dead, for, whatever they had done, they would not do again. But the living were a constant living menace. Perhaps if the thing were not a race . . . But if not a race—then what? He pondered the matter for a while and then demanded earnestly:

"Patrick, why are you always getting into fights?"

"Why?" Patrick turned his mangled head. "It's the Irish in me, I suppose."

"But *why* do you always get the worst of it?"

"Because I'm Jewish."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. Suddenly he thought of Black Beard and asked to have the radio turned on. An excited voice immediately responded:

"This is your announcer, Eddie Clapp, and you'd never guess where I am. Well, friends, I am sitting up to my neck in straw in the haymow of a barn which is the field headquarters of J. Edgar Hoover and his staff, about fifteen miles from Amarillo, Texas. I am looking through a knothole. The sun is shining brightly on a peaceful farming country. But this seemingly deserted terrain is literally alive with more than two hundred sturdy G men and special deputies, armed to the teeth, who are creeping from cover to cover as they cautiously advance in an ever-narrowing circle. The glint of a weapon, a ripple in the grass, the swaying of a cornstalk—that's all that can be seen. They are old hands, these G men.

"I am looking through the knothole. Directly before my eyes, about one hundred yards away, is the farmhouse where the outlaw lies in hiding. It is a modest, unpainted farmhouse typical of thousands of others in this section of our country. But it is apparently deserted and abandoned. No smoke curls from the chimney and there is no sign of human life. Some underwear is idly flapping on a clothesline, forgotten when the occupants took flight. Chickens are scratching in the yard, and two cows, blissfully unaware of the impending tragedy, are munching grass near the front door. It is a peaceful rural scene, my friends, and there is nothing for us to do but wait, with what patience we can muster, for the signal to attack."

A second voice broke in: "Through the courtesy of Rosydent, and for the first time in radio history, we bring you the capture,

dead or alive, of an outlawed public enemy. Tonight before you go to bed, Rosydent Tooth Paste——"

There was a faint crack and Mr. Littlejohn shuddered. The first voice interrupted, stuttering with excitement: "Yes, that was a rifle shot. You heard it, didn't you? A rifle shot all right. Wait a moment now. Just a moment, please. Yes, there it is. I see it now. A little puff of smoke behind a bush. Well, things are starting now. Five men—no, six—no, five—they're running from a ditch. They crouch behind a water trough. Friends, that was thrilling—right across the open ground, a good fifty-yard dash. More men are running. What are they carrying there? Yes, it's a machine gun. They're setting it up behind a chicken shed. Things are happening fast now, friends. The men behind the water trough are doing something. Looks like they're throwing balls. Gas bombs, that's what they are. Crash. There goes a window. One landed in a flock of chickens. They're running away. Two of them are down. No, wait, three—four. Four chickens down (a fusillade of cracks). They're firing all around. A cow is down. It's rolling on its back. Its feet are sticking up. Friends, I'm afraid that cow is dead. The other one is running wildly, blindly. A G man is in her path. He's dodging, running back. Hah! The cow has got him. He may be badly hurt. There goes the machine gun (rat-tat-tat-tat-tat). They're riddling that farmhouse like a sieve. Gas is pouring from the windows. The wind has changed. It's blowing back. More chickens have succumbed. The men behind the water trough seem to have a whiff of it. They're falling back. One is on his knees. His comrades help him up. Several are staggering blindly. Wait! Look! It's not just gas pouring from the windows. It's smoke. The farmhouse is on fire . . ."

Patrick grazed a truck and ran off the road into the ditch. Mr. Littlejohn was shaking like a leaf. He said: "I think we had better stay here in the ditch until this thing is over."

". . . two hundred men converging on the burning house.

A private wire flash says the man hit by the cow has got a broken leg. They're coming on, holding their fire to the end. Black Beard may be dead or wounded or he may be lurking there behind the door with his deadly weapons aimed to clear his path. Another wire flash. Three of the gas attacking party have been gassed. They're charging on. The cornfield flattens out beneath their feet. A patch of vegetables is trampled down. They're in the yard—across it—at the door. Crash. Crash. They're smashing in the doors and windows with axes . . ."

Mr. Littlejohn was crouching like a panther. The taste of gas was in his throat. He felt his back against a wall and heard the sing of bullets past his ears. He would not yield himself, but die here in his tracks with his weapons in his hands . . .

". . . it is over. In a moment Joe Schmulz, alias Black Beard, America's outstanding public enemy, will be dragged, dead or alive, out of the burning farmhouse where, since yesterday, he has been trapped. I am looking for his evil face and black mustache. Here they come now, running toward this barn, the field headquarters, to report to their commander. One is running out ahead. We shall have the news in just a moment now. Dead no doubt. Be patient, friends. The man is shouting as he comes. I can't quite hear the words. He's coming closer. What's that? What's that he says? It's terrific, this suspense. Now, once more. Black Beard—gone? *What?* Wait a moment, friends. There must be some mistake. Yes. No. Not dead or wounded. That's what he says. *NOT THERE.* Not there at all. No one in the house. That's what he says. *Black Beard has escaped once more.*"

"Hurrah!" cried Mr. Littlejohn.

Patrick fell off the seat onto the floor. He got up groaning, turned off the radio and regarded his employer with an injured and suspicious air.

"Is this guy a friend of yours?"

"No—not exactly," stammered Mr. Littlejohn, his teeth chattering with excitement. "But it—it's like a football game."

"Humph!" Patrick started up the motor and pulled out of the ditch, and he said over his shoulder that it was not like a football game at all, but actually resembled a small-scale reproduction of a capitalistic war. One gang of bandits out to get another. And what had they accomplished? Killed some chickens and a harmless cow; destroyed a cornfield and a vegetable patch; burned down a farmer's house. The only other casualties involved they had stupidly inflicted on themselves, and the farmer whose possessions they had wrecked, would be taxed to pay the bill.

"There is something in what you say, Patrick," Mr. Littlejohn admitted. "But I incline to the belief that war is primarily an individual matter and will continue to afflict the human race until the warlike disposition of the individual has been, in some way, banished. For there can be nothing in the whole which is not in the part, and nothing, good or evil, in the group which is not in the individual man." He started with surprise at this idea which had never occurred to him before.

"Nuts!" said Patrick. "Human beings are the product of their social-economic status, and you've simply got the cart before the horse."

"That may be," Mr. Littlejohn admitted. "The question of 'the chicken or the egg' has never been an easy one to solve. But I suspect that the doctrine of original sin is as valid as the theory you present and that neither is as valid as it sounds." He reflected for some moments. "Greed and fear appear to be the obvious sources of a warlike disposition and, collectively, of war. And how shall they be eliminated in the ideal social state? For, though a man may no longer covet his neighbor's house or ox, there is nothing in your plan to alter his desire to possess his neighbor's wife, so that,

in fact, we have not touched the roots of greed at all, but only trained some tendrils of the vine.

"And as for fear: assuming complete security of economic life, there will still remain *death*—the greatest fear of all. No, no, Patrick, it is not so easy as you think—or—" He leaned back in the corner, murmuring doubtfully to himself, "Or—perhaps it is *easier*—than that."

Patrick muttered sulkily that he did not understand a word of all this stuff which was counter-revolutionary bunk, and he shrugged the matter from his shoulders. They crossed the Mississippi on Highway 54. Mr. Littlejohn gazed out dreamily at the Father of Waters which appeared to be composed of liquid mud and looked hard enough to walk on. He continued to reflect:

Greed and *fear*. Those were the dogs that followed you through life, snapping at your heels from the cradle to the grave. But how get rid of them? If you could answer that, you might be getting close to the core of the enigma. Well, what was *greed*? The desire to *possess*—land and houses, wealth and power, people and affection, everything in fact—and to lock up all these things in your individual cell whence they were always struggling to escape. And this of course brought *fear*—fear that they'd get away as they nearly always did. Even your very life you tried to lock up too in your individual self. But you couldn't keep it there and you always knew you couldn't, and the knowledge was a constant living terror. For no matter how you guarded it, one day it would slip out through a keyhole or a crack. And when it went, everything else went with it.

Greed was simply a desire to possess what you knew you couldn't keep, and fear was the knowledge that you couldn't. No wonder these twin demons traveled hand in hand. He glanced out at the landscape which sped by like a technicolor film. Life was very much like that: "here she comes" and "there she goes." It was silly to imagine you could clutch

a little piece of it and confine it in yourself—as silly as to dream of locking up a comet. Well, suppose you didn't lock up things at all—not your house nor your sweetheart nor your *life*. Suppose you just went out and met everything halfway—detached and free from your dark and gloomy cell—dissolved into the universal sea. Then there would be nothing left to keep and nothing left to lose because *you'd be a part of everything, yourself*. And where would greed and fear be now?—and war?—and all the other ugly beasts that followed in their track?—Eureka!

But not so fast. How get out of your cell? If you didn't have some formula for escaping from this trap, which you must have constructed through the ages as the snail had built its shell, then the whole idea was just an idle dream. He sighed and shook his head. He had been all over that this morning. It wanted a picklock like Houdini or an iron man like Black Beard—good, cunning Black Beard. He stroked his mustache with a glow of satisfaction. A real lone wolf, marked like a black jack in a deck of cards, making rabbits out of G men. A man who could dodge and twist like that might develop a technique for escaping from himself. Hum . . . At least it was an interesting idea.

VI

ON HIGHWAY 40, IN THE OUTSKIRTS of Columbia, Missouri, Mr. Littlejohn glanced at the passing scene and suddenly cried, "Stop!"

A man was standing by the roadside with a small dog beside him on a leash. His head was bare and snow-white hair framed a fragile, sensitive face. He wore a neat black suit, shiny from long use, and a little black bow tie, and he had a violin case beneath his arm. He stood very stiff and straight, a frail and wistful figure, pointing toward the west and smiling hopefully.

"Can we give you a lift?" Mr. Littlejohn inquired.

"Oh, thank you, sir—" the man replied with a slightly foreign accent, and he stepped forward awkwardly and fumbled for the handle of the door.

"Step on it!" Patrick said impatiently.

"I am sorry to be clumsy, but—I am blind."

"Blind? Patrick!" Mr. Littlejohn spoke sharply. "Get out and help that gentleman into the car." Patrick grumbled but obeyed, and the little dog jumped in behind his master and sat between them on the seat.

"I perceive that you are a musician," ventured Mr. Littlejohn when they were once more under way.

"Yes, sir, I am." He introduced himself as Albert Becker and added in a gentle, pleasant voice that he was connected with the symphony orchestra of the Kansas City Federal Music Project. He had come to Columbia to spend the day with an old friend who was a teacher in the university, but

he must be back in Kansas City by eight o'clock as the orchestra was to give a program that same evening. "So you see," he smiled, "I am deeply in your debt."

"It is a pleasure," Mr. Littlejohn assured him. "You are, I believe, a foreigner?"

"An Austrian, sir, born in Vienna." His shoulders straightened slightly. "I was once first violin in the Vienna Philharmonic."

"Indeed?" Mr. Littlejohn was so intrigued by something in the blind man's face that he could scarcely take his eyes from it. "You must have had a very interesting life."

"Yes—interesting." His inflection and his smile were enigmatic. "I was young in a place where life was gay and very pleasant—not regarded as a problem or a task, but as a thing to be enjoyed. Perhaps that was wrong and what has happened since is a penalty for being so mistaken. I have wondered about that. But Vienna, in my youth and early manhood, was a place from which one did not wish to go away, and we Viennese believed that we were happy."

"A charming life," murmured Mr. Littlejohn. "Music and friends . . ."

"Yes." The blind man smiled and nodded. "I have had many friends and some acclaim though I am not and never was a great musician. And I have had great joy and beauty in my life, and also tragedy. It must be always so, I think—not one without the other. But the beauty and the joy we never fully realize until the tragedy has come to clear our vision. So perhaps that is the reason for it." He paused. "Now I have left my violin and this little dog . . ."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. It seemed to him that, behind the sightless eyes, there was a peace and understanding such as he had never seen before in any human countenance. At length he said, choosing his words with care, "It is clear from what you say that you have suffered deeply and that you have lost the things that most men treasure."

"Yes, sir, that is true."

"But I suspect that you have found something that few men find."

"Please?"

"I mean, an answer to it all—an understanding of this thing called *life*."

"Oh, yes, I see." The radiance of his smile was like a halo. "Well, that is also true."

"And—could you tell me what it is?"

"Tell you—what I have found?"

"I beg you to believe it is not idle curiosity . . ."

"I am sure of that, sir. And I will gladly tell you anything I can, but I do not know what it will mean to you since understanding is an individual matter and comes to each man, if it comes at all, along the pathway of his own experience."

"Yes, I know," Mr. Littlejohn agreed. "Still, the experience of another might contain a clue. And if it is not painful for you to recall . . ."

"Painful?" The blind man shook his head. "There is no pain and you are welcome to my story. It is difficult to know just what to tell, but—I will try . . ."

Mr. Littlejohn leaned back in the corner of the seat with his eyes upon the blind man's face. The sun was setting now, a disc of burnished gold behind the western prairie.

"I lived with my mother in Vienna, in the house in which I had been born, in a pleasant neighborhood. My father, who was also a musician, died when I was very young, and I was an only child. We were in comfortable circumstances—certainly not rich but neither were we poor—and we had many friends in the social group to which, by taste and position, we belonged. Such things were taken more or less for granted in that day and one stayed in the place where one was born. Everyone assumed that I would be a musician like my father and, indeed, I had thought of nothing else; so that, in course of time, by studious application and some natural talent and a deep inherent love of music, I made

progress and was duly admitted to the Philharmonic. I was thirty and I was very proud and happy. In a sense I had fulfilled my destiny and my future seemed secure.

"I was not very strong—not physically robust, and my eyes, which already gave me trouble, perhaps as the result of an illness in my childhood, were a source of great anxiety to my mother. But I did not think about it much. Reading music all day long, much of it in manuscript, certainly this was a strain. Sometime perhaps I should have to guard my sight, but not today. I was young and life stretched on forever. I had never been in love, but I had my music and my mother and my home, and I was not uncomfortable nor lonely. I thought: yes, love will come some day. But I was not impatient.

"Some pupils came to me for lessons—friends at first, but it was said I had a gift for teaching and then I had many applications. I did not need the money, though it was nice to have for vacations in the summer, so I would not accept many, and this made people more anxious to employ me. One day I received a note which surprised and flattered me. It was from a certain Baroness whose husband was connected with the General Staff—a rich, proud family distantly related to the Hapsburgs. She requested that I call to discuss music lessons for her daughter. I did so, but I did not see the mother—indeed, I never saw her. A secretary interviewed me. They wished me to give the lessons in their home, but my time was filled and I, too, was proud and independent. I said that it would not be possible, and so it was arranged that the young lady would come to my house twice a week. Some days later she came with her duenna and I saw her for the first time . . .

He took an old-fashioned locket from the pocket of his vest and disclosed a miniature of a lovely, fair-haired girl.

"I have not seen the picture for many years, but it was

so that she looked when she first came to me, and it is so that I remember her . . .

"Luise," Mr. Littlejohn read the name engraved beneath the picture.

"Luise," the blind man repeated softly. "But I always called her Luli." He took the locket back and returned it to his pocket. "We fell in love as people do in storybooks. Well, there is nothing new in that. It is an old, old miracle which no one can explain. We did not make much progress with the lessons but in a month we were betrothed—the poor musician and the fairy princess . . .

"I wished to call upon her father but she urged me to leave everything to her. It would not matter what her parents said or did, they could not change her mind. She laughed at my anxieties. She was not afraid. It was true, she was not afraid of anything, not then or ever in her life. She had that quality which the French know as *élan*—gallantry of soul. In all the years that followed I never heard her utter a complaint nor saw defeat behind her eyes.

"Next day the storm broke. Luli had two brothers, officers in the army. They called on me but they were so outraged at my presumption that they could hardly speak. One of them slapped my face. They ordered me to leave the country. They said that I would never see their sister again and I believed them. I thought that I had lost her. My mother tried to comfort me but I was frantic. I went to the office of the General Staff but I could not gain admittance to her father. Then I ran to their house to have the door slammed in my face. For hours I paced the street until a policeman ordered me away. Two days of agony went by and on the second night I answered a knock at the door to find her standing on the threshold. They had sent her on a train with her duenna to visit relatives in Italy, but she had escaped at the first station and come back. She laughed as she described the trick that she had played. But at any

moment now a telegram might reach her family, so we must run away this very night. And then she put her arms around my neck and looked close into my eyes. 'Nothing can ever part us, Albert.' That is what she said. And so we ran away and were married in a little village in the Tyrol where we spent our honeymoon. It was in June of the year 1914. The mountains were decked with wildflowers . . . And it was there that we learned that the heir to the Austrian throne, Franz Ferdinand, had been killed in Sarejevo."

Mr. Littlejohn exclaimed involuntarily beneath his breath.

"Yes," the blind man nodded, "it was a bitter day for us and for countless other lovers. I need not dwell upon the years that followed. My eyesight was not good enough for guns but I learned to drive a truck. At long intervals I was permitted to come home for a few fleeting days. Luli's brothers were both killed. My mother died. I was very ill myself for a long time. These things happened to us all and they were not too difficult to bear because they were so common. But when at last the long nightmare was over and I came home to stay, I found with a pang of apprehension that I needed thicker lenses for my glasses.

"The war had left its mark on me. I was restless and confused. Vienna was no longer gay but filled with sadness, and the modest competence my father had accumulated through his life, had vanished. We were no longer comfortably well off but must depend upon my violin for our living. A panic seized me at the thought, but Luli laughed away my fears. Life was today, she said, and we must not cross its bridges in advance. Supper was cooking on the stove and we should not be hungry *now*. If some matter must be faced tomorrow, then tomorrow would be time enough to face it. We had each other and nothing could hurt us very much as long as that was true. The only thing we had to fear was fear itself which did strange things to human souls and might perhaps materialize the substance from the shadow. Thus she soothed

away my doubts, not once but many times, for they were deeply rooted in my heart and kept returning to the surface.

"I could not seem to gather up the threads where I had put them down. Everything was difficult and different. Pupils did not come to me as they had come before. Almost everyone was struggling and unhappy. I thought if I could go away to some new place that I would find the confidence which I had lost and the idea grew until it took possession of me. In America I would begin to live again. I could talk of nothing else and Luli was infected with my eagerness. We read all the books about America that we could find and spent long hours studying maps. At length, with the help of friends, a position was promised with the New York Symphony, and we sold the house in which I had been born and set out joyfully on this great adventure.

"New York depressed and frightened me. In time I came to know it better but at first it seemed to me I had come to a place where everyone was mad. I spoke but a few words of halting English and I dared not go out on the street without Luli at my side. To her the place was also mad but it was amusing too and sometimes she would laugh till the tears came to her eyes at things she heard and saw. But I did not often see the funny side. We had very little money and were obliged to live in a way we had never lived before, in a neighborhood that was not prepossessing. There were no flowers and no trees and no cafés where one could read the papers and drink a cup of coffee. There was no music, no theater that we could afford or that I could understand. Life seemed to have no meaning. The director of the orchestra received me kindly and my colleagues, some of whom were Austrians like myself, were friendly. But it was so unlike Vienna and so far from what I had imagined that my heart was in my shoes for a long time.

"Perhaps Luli also suffered but if so, I never knew. When I came from rehearsal or a concert to the stuffy little room

which was our home, it was always to be greeted with a smile and cheerful words. I knew that I could count on that. And the miracle of soul that was behind it I had long since ceased to question. The courage and sympathy of a companion are like a staff that one comes more and more to lean upon until at last he cannot walk alone . . .

"Gradually I made the adaptation to my new life. Some pupils served to supplement our income and we were able to move into a small apartment in a better neighborhood. It was not like the home that we had left but it was comfortable and Luli made it dainty and attractive. In time we had a small circle of friends and I began once more to feel the solid ground beneath my feet. We had wanted very much to have a child and now we dared to think that we might do so. We talked of it and of a little place that we might hope to have sometime, outside the city in the country, where there would be trees and flowers.

"And then one day I stumbled at rehearsal because I could not see the notes, and realized with a start of terror that the thick lenses of my glasses were not thick enough. I went immediately to consult a noted oculist, a fellow countryman. He was kind but noncommittal. The strength of the lenses could be increased a little but there was nothing else that he could do. 'But, doctor, please be frank with me,' I asked. 'Am I going to be blind?'—'I cannot tell you that, Herr Becker,' he replied. 'But you must spare your eyes in every way you can.' I, a musician, spare my eyes! I laughed hysterically. It was an impossible prescription.

"I went home in despair and poured out the terror that was gnawing at my heart. Luli put her arms around me and held my head against her breast. I must not be afraid, she said. I was not blind. My eyes were looking into hers, and hers would always be there if I needed them. If the worst came to the worst, as of course it never would since lightning did not strike where one expected it, then one pair of eyes

would serve for both. As for the doctor, what had he really said? Merely that he did not know. And indeed who did know anything?

"There followed a few months of agonizing doubts and momentary hopes, and then the fact could no longer be denied. My sight was failing rapidly. I could not read the music which was our livelihood. And now the fear that I should lose my position with the orchestra overwhelmed all others. There was nothing to be done but to memorize each program, and hour after hour, sometimes until dawn, Luli sat beside me repeating aloud the notes which I must carry in my weary brain. It was a dull and hideous ordeal and I began to hate the music I had loved. We had no diversion since I insisted that we pinch and save against the day we might be penniless, and we no longer saw our friends. We had no time for friends, no time for anything except our endless task. And also I was sensitive. I did not want anyone to know of my affliction. I confided only in one man who sat beside me in the orchestra and who would help me with a whispered warning if I faltered.

"For some time things went on this way and then the inevitable happened. A soloist was taken ill and the program was changed at the last moment. The substituted piece was one with which I was familiar but, in the sudden effort to replace one visual image with another, I became confused and blundered. In an instant I realized what I had done and everything fled from my mind. Through the remainder of the piece I sat mutely with my violin resting on my knees as if a string were broken. At the end of the program, as I was preparing to go home, I was told that the director wished to see me in his office.

" 'Herr Becker,' he said gruffly when I came into the room, 'you have played two bars of Beethoven in a composition written by Tschaikovsky.'—'Maestro,' I replied, for I had determined that I would not lie, 'Maestro, I am going blind.'

'So, Herr Becker.' He came and stood beside me. 'I have known that for a long time but it is no longer possible for me to pretend that I am ignorant.' He embraced me and I felt his tears against my face. 'Yes, Maestro, I understand.' I went home in a daze. It seemed to me that nothing more could happen.

"Luli held me in her arms until at last I fell asleep. When I awoke I heard her moving in the room. I raised up on my elbow and she said, 'Breakfast is ready, Albert.' 'Breakfast?' I was stupefied. 'But it is still dark.' I heard her catch her breath and then she came and kneeled beside the bed and took my hand. It was not dark. The blow had fallen in the night and I was blind . . .

"I was forty but my hair was turning white. I thought myself already an old man. But my wife was young and beautiful and her spirit was unbroken. She did not falter now. Already she was planning for the future. There were so many things that I could do, she said. The music of Vienna, I knew it all by heart; no one could play it better. And I could go on teaching. Not only that but, freed now from the heavy burden of uncertainty, I could turn my thought and talent to composing. Yes, that was an idea, a thing which I had always wanted leisure to begin. I groaned and turned away my face. 'Albert,' she cried, 'how can I make you understand that the security you seek is something deep inside yourself beyond the reach of poverty or fear? Listen to me, darling. I love you—I adore you so. The only thing I cannot bear is that you should be unhappy. But see, if it should come that you must play your violin in the street, I will be there beside you—and life can still be fun if we believe it can.' That is what she said, but I could not understand.

"For months I lived in a black lethargy and for hours at a time I would sit in brooding silence. Luli read to me until her voice was hoarse and every day she took me out to walk about the streets. Our meager savings dwindled and we moved

into a cheaper place and then a cheaper one. Most of my pupils left me, not for the reason of my blindness but because I had no heart in what I did. The question of money became pressing but still I made no effort. Luli was offered a position as a governess but I would not consent. I could not bear the thought that she should leave me for a moment and, to protect myself against the possibility, I stubbornly refused to learn the habits of the blind. I would not take a step without the guidance of her hand. She found some work that she could do at home, making artificial flowers, by which she could sometimes, in a day of painful effort, earn a dollar.

"At length, through the kindness of a friend, I secured a position in a night club. Luli would bring me to the door at ten o'clock and come again to take me home at three or four. I played, with an accompaniment, the songs I had sung in Vienna as a boy. But I had no heart in it. I could not stroll with careless gaiety among the tables as I played, and often tears would gather in my eyes when the music brought back memories of the past. People who go about to dance and drink do not wish to be depressed by the presence of a blind man, and so after a while I was dismissed.

"Another night club followed and another, each cheaper and more tawdry than the last. They paid me very little and there were long intervals between. We were compelled to move again, this time into a lodging house. I could not see its ugliness but the coarse voices of our neighbors filled me with a sense of degradation and despair. The things that one mentions in a moment can happen very slowly. Our descent from decent comfort to actual poverty occupied two years. But we were so close to the bottom now that there were days we did not have enough to eat. Luli sewed and patched my threadbare clothes but they would not last much longer. My health was failing too and I was thin and weak with hardly strength to drag myself around. And the summer time was

coming when work would be more difficult to get for both of us. It seemed not far now to the day when I must go into the street with a tin cup in my hand and a placard on my breast . . .

"Things were at this state when I was surprised to receive a visit from a member of the orchestra, a man I had not known very well. He had come, so he said, at the request of the director. The Maestro was to make a European tour which would necessitate his absence for the summer. He had a seaside cottage in a secluded spot near a small fishing village in Connecticut and, as he would have no use for it during several months, it had occurred to him that perhaps we would care to occupy it in his absence. It was modest but quite comfortable with elm trees and a garden and a broad white beach close by. Luli exclaimed and clapped her hands with joy. And it involved no obligation, my visitor explained, as the Maestro would feel more than repaid by the knowledge that someone he knew was living there and caring for the property. We accepted this kind offer as a gift from Heaven, and it was not until long afterward I learned that Luli had arranged it all herself.

"It was like the fulfillment of a dream. To wake up in the morning and hear birds singing in the tree outside the window, and to smell the scent of earth and flowers—I had forgotten what such things were like. After a while I came to know the place through Luli's eyes. I would stand upon the porch pointing with my cane. 'And what is there?' And she would tell me. 'A big elm tree and, through the lattice of the branches, a glimpse of beach, and then the sea.'—'And there?'—'The garden.' And she would name the flowers back to the hollyhocks which grew against a rustic fence. 'And there?'—'A honeysuckle vine, and there is a bird's nest tucked in near the top.' And then she would question me to see how much I had retained. At first I got things badly mixed but gradually I came to know every aspect of the scene.

"We had no neighbors and the fishing village, where we went occasionally to purchase our supplies, was a mile away beyond a rocky point. In the morning, when the house was put in order, Luli was busy in the garden, and bit by bit I learned to help her with some simple things like pulling certain weeds I could distinguish with my hand. When I was tired I would sit in the shade beneath a tree listening to every sound, and if I could not hear her I would call out in alarm. 'Luli, where are you?'—'I am here, Albert,' she would answer. And then I was content. In the afternoon we would go down to the beach along a winding path that led among the trees. And then we would sit idly in the sand or read a book, and sometimes she would leave me and run into the water for a swim. And I would wait, straining my ears to hear above the surf, till she came running back. She loved the sea and she was not afraid of it.

"The days and weeks went by so fast. My health revived and something I had thought was dead began to stir again within my soul, but often I would start with terror when I thought of the time this dream must end. What would happen then? To provide us with the little that we needed we had sold our last pitiful possessions—my watch and Luli's ring, some silver that had been my mother's. But when that was gone and the summertime was finished, what were we to do? Our situation was still desperate. Luli could read my thoughts in the expression of my face. 'Who can see around the corner?' she would say. 'Life is *now*. Let us enjoy each moment while we can.'

"For a long time I had not touched my violin but now I began to play again. And one day, when I was idly improvising, a melody came into my head. I was thrilled; I had created something. 'Luli!' I cried, and when she came running from the kitchen, 'Listen to this now.' I played a few bars of the theme. It was a waltz. 'Why, Albert, it is beautiful!' She stooped to kiss me. 'I knew you could.' Yes, well perhaps I

could. I was so excited I could hardly eat my lunch. That afternoon I took my violin with me to the beach, and sat in the sand working at the piece, trying this and that. 'Do you like it so?—or so?' And then we would debate some variation of the theme. At length she ran away to take her swim, but she would not go far, she said—not farther than my voice would reach in case I wanted her. I nodded absently. I was absorbed.

"When one is working at a creative task he has no sense of time, and so I do not know how long it was before I realized that I had been alone for a long while. I called her name. There was no answer and I called again with a vague feeling of alarm. And then suddeny I *knew* that she was gone." He paused. It had grown dark and Mr. Littlejohn could no longer see his face.

"It is difficult to say how one *knows* things, but all that I did or thought from that time on was without hope. I told myself that she had gone back to the house, that she had run along the beach farther than she thought or lain down to rest and dropped asleep, that she had swum until she was fatigued and been picked up by a boat, that she was coming back to me, that any moment I would hear her voice. And then she would be in my arms again and we would laugh about it. But all the time I knew it was not true. I ran into the sea and called and called. The surf was high and I was thrown down and could not tell which way to go but struggled somehow to the shore, and knelt down in the sand and tried to pray, and thought I heard her call my name and ran this way and that until I fell down from exhaustion. And then I could not find the place where I had been nor the path that led back to the house.

"All night I sat there in the sand. In the morning a fisherman came by and took me home. Then others came. They said it was a dangerous place to swim. There was an undertow that swept around the point with the ebb tide. Even a strong

swimmer might be helpless. But it was strange, they thought, that she had not called for help. Help from a blind man? I turned away my face. And it was not like her to call for help, not ever in her life, not even then. Next day they found her. Friends came and took me to the city. All that could be done they did. They were so kind. Nearly all people are kind, I think, when they are not afraid." He paused again and for so long that Mr. Littlejohn wondered if he had more to say.

"They found a place for me to live, a tiny room provided by their charity, and there, when the first stupefying shock had passed, I began to know the measure of my loss. And I cried out for help. But they could only answer me with words which had no meaning for me. I must turn to God, they said. But I did not know God or where to look for Him. In all my life I had learned nothing that could help me now. I could not even walk alone or read the writing of the blind or cut my meat or find an object I had dropped. There is a decent period for grief and then one must begin again or be forgotten. But I could not begin and so as time went on people came less frequently to see me and often I would sit for days in silent darkness waiting for the sound of a familiar footstep on the stairs.

"One night I got up from my bed and stood beside the window. And I thought, I have only to step across the sill and there will be an end. I put my foot up on the edge and then suddenly drew back. I was afraid. Afraid? I sat down in my chair and laughed at the absurdity. Afraid of what? I was bereft of everything but *fear*. And I seemed to see my life spread out upon a map with fear like a great river running through it—a muddy, swollen stream sweeping everything before it. Fear was the enemy and now the one possession I had left. If I could lose that too! I started at the thought. And I reasoned with myself aloud. One who is

stripped must be impervious to attack. How can I be afraid? I who have nothing left to lose.

"And suddenly I felt a sense of peace as if a mountain had been rolled away, and a great stillness in myself—an ecstasy of quiet. And from the very depth of it a voice whispered my name. I had heard that voice before, when I knelt upon the beach and tried to pray, but then I had been frightened and confused, and I had run to look for it and lost it. This time I knew better and I waited.

" 'I am here, Albert, where I have always been.' I was listening to a voice within myself. 'Why do you grieve? Is it because you cannot see my face? But for a long time you have not seen it. Is it my voice you miss? Not that, but thoughts I tried to utter and could not very well express with words. Is it the feeling of my hand? No, but something that was deep behind it. Well then it was not really flesh and blood, the mechanism I have lost, but rather the soul that used it for a time and now is free to speak more clearly than it ever could in life and to be seen without distortion by better instruments than eyes and to be felt with truer sense than hands. All that you loved is here within yourself for love is unity of soul, and we are one as we have always been. Death is not a separation but a closer joining.'

"That was many years ago, but the peace that came to me that night has never left me. It happened later that I did go out into the street with a tin cup in my hand and a placard on my breast, but I did not go alone and I was not afraid." He turned his face toward Mr. Littlejohn. "Have I answered what you wished to know?"

"Yes," said Mr. Littlejohn, "you have." He wanted to say something more, to pour out the emotion that was choking him, but he could not think of a single word to add which would not be an impertinence. He looked out of the window and saw that they were passing along a busy thoroughfare.

"Kansas City," Patrick said.

They left the blind man at the corner of a street which was only a few steps, he said, from where he wished to go. But still Mr. Littlejohn could not think of anything to say except "God bless you," which seemed banal and absurd but he said it anyway. And he shook the blind man's hand and watched him briskly thread his way along the crowded pavement with the old violin case underneath his arm and the small dog trotting on the leash before him.

VII

THE NEON LIGHTS DIMMED OUT AND the noisy city faded into silence.

Mr. Littlejohn reviewed the blind man's story. Nearly all people were kind when they were not afraid. Yes, that was true, he thought. It all came back to fear no matter where you started. And was it possible you could, as Luli had suggested, materialize the substance from the shadow?—create the disaster that you dreaded? Was misfortune anything except a point of view?—not yours alone perhaps but of other people too, in which you were involved—of the family and the group, the nation and the race, and all humanity. He shivered. It was horrible to think of all the vagrant fears that filled the world being sternly converted into facts. Yet there might be something in it . . .

He held up his hand and wiggled the fingers back and forth. They moved, he reflected, at the bidding of his thought and could not move without it. The wheels that spun beneath him, and the motor of the car, the car itself—what were they but ideas—somebody's dreams converted into action? And what was a city or a blade of grass? They didn't just occur; someone had to think about them first. If it came to that, what was a man? He caught his breath. You started with a microscopic cell and became a human being. There had to be an architect for that, an intelligence that guided every step. Without it the original cell would continue just a cell, if indeed it would be anything at all. There were his fingers, parts of an intricate machine, but they wouldn't even

wiggle unless he gave the order. Yes, there was intelligence in every living thing. Life itself was an idea—or was it the reflection of an idea? Which was substance? Which was shadow? Which was *real*? Was thought reality?—and life, as we perceived it, a magic lantern picture on the wall? Hum . . . Well, no matter now.

Thought was a serious affair. It did create whatever was created. You couldn't always see it work because there were so many thoughts, and they must cross and counter-cross, confirm and contradict each other—like interference on a radio. He started. Yes, like a radio, the whole amazing process—receiving everything—broadcasting everything—a universal symphony of thought. If the music seemed chaotic and discordant, it might be just a matter of *fine tuning*. But how tune yourself to good reception?—that was the question. The blind man had succeeded; you could see it in his face. But tuning was an individual matter which depended on receptive apparatus. . . .

They stopped at an auto camp a few miles from Topeka. It was called The Super Chief and the lunchroom was constructed like a dining car with a narrow aisle between two rows of tables and a bell cord suspended from the ceiling. A sad-eyed little man with an anxious beaming face received them at the door. There was no one else in sight. He said he could accommodate his guests in compartments in the observation car.

"And for dinner, gentlemen, I recommend our Chicken Maryland." He pulled the bell cord and a locomotive bell responded with a dismal hollow sound. A short fat darky in a white chef's cap came in from the kitchen. "Henry, I have suggested our Chicken Maryland."

"I'll take a steak," said Patrick, and he sat down in a chair and fell asleep immediately.

"A steak?" The steward looked at Henry anxiously, and Mr. Littlejohn fancied that he winked his eye.

"De steak ain' fit to serve." Henry shook his head. "But de chicken fine and tendah." And he went back to the kitchen.

The little man busied himself about the table, chatting all the while in a nervous eager way. He had been for many years, he said, a dining car conductor with Fred Harvey. But the railroad business wasn't what it had been. People didn't ride much any more, and most of those that did were really not desirable. They wanted a full meal for fifty cents and would sometimes leave a nickel for the waiter. The world had changed. But people still liked trains, he thought, although they didn't ride on them, and he, himself, could never feel at home in anything that wasn't like a diner. That's why he'd built this auto camp just like a railway train, and he had his old cook, Henry, who had been with him for years. It was like going on except of course you didn't sway around the curves and when you looked out of the window things were always just the same, and—Fred Harvey wasn't there to pay the bills. He laughed but there was something macabre in the sound.

"It's a new idea," he said, "and new ideas take time. But when the traveling public finds that it can drive the highway and still eat in a diner and sleep securely in a Pullman car—well, I think it will catch on." And he added with a wistful note, "Don't you?"

"Yes, indeed," Mr. Littlejohn assured him, but he felt by no means certain. Who could tell what people wanted when they didn't know themselves? Henry came in with the dinner, and Patrick awoke and stared gloomily at the chicken.

"I ordered steak," he said.

"No, suh, you ordered *chicken.*"

"Am I a liar?"

"I doan' know what you is," said Henry with a scowling brow, "but *chicken's* what you ordered."

"Don't give me any back talk, nigger."

Henry grabbed a knife and lunged across the table. The steward rushed into the breach and overturned a glass of water

into Patrick's plate. Then he took the knife away from Henry and led him to the kitchen. Patrick poured the water from his plate and sponged off the chicken with a paper napkin. He had no use for niggers anyway, he said. They had no solidarity.

Mr. Littlejohn ate his dinner thoughtfully. The chicken was succulent and tender, and the French fried potatoes crisp and brown. When he had finished he pushed back his plate and regarded Patrick earnestly.

"Patrick, of what are you afraid?"

"Me? Afraid?" Patrick raised his head and stared.

"Yes, *afraid*."

"I'm not afraid of anything."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn and, after a few moments, excused himself abruptly.

The steward saw him to his room which was in a near-by shed and resembled a Pullman car compartment only in its size. The little man kept talking all the time, painfully and abjectly. He apologized a dozen times. Henry was a sensitive, temperamental darky and likely to flare up on the slightest provocation, but his heart was as big as all outdoors. He had known him, man and boy, for thirty years, and he wasn't just a servant but a friend.

"I guess about the only one I've got," he said with a quaver in his voice. As for the steak—well, the plain truth was they didn't have one in the house. They hadn't had a steak for several weeks or even hamburger. The butchers in Topeka had shut down on his credit. He couldn't blame them much; he owed them plenty. But it was chicken now—or nothing.

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. He wondered vaguely why the poulterers were more lenient but he did not raise the question.

The room was cold and he undressed in haste and got into his bed which was a hard and narrow bunk against the wall. A Pullman car was one thing on a railway train, he thought, but was it anything at all stationary in the country? Everything belonged some place and when you got to moving things around

they just became confusing and uncomfortable. People were like that too, always getting into places where they didn't seem to fit—this dining car steward for example who belonged, by every law of nature, in a Harvey dining car—but a real one that was moving on a track.

He composed himself to sleep but sleep evaded him, and the blind man's tragic story unrolled before his eyes. In the end he had gone out into the street with a tin cup in his hand and a placard on his breast, but he had not gone alone and he had not been afraid. Luli had gone with him and she was with him now every moment of the day. And once more he saw the picture in the locket, the soft blond hair and laughing eyes. He could almost hear her voice, "Love is unity of soul, and death is not a separation but a closer joining."

Well, it might be. Love was an idea, perhaps the greatest one of all. Once started on its way it could sweep everything before it—fear and grief and loneliness—till it filled up every nook and cranny. Not death nor anything at all could hinder or destroy it. He sat up in excitement. Yes, love might be the universal formula, the key to every individual cell. But stop a bit: *you had to be in love to make a start.* He sighed and sank back on his pillow. There was bound to be a catch in it somewhere. The enigma was like a jigsaw puzzle with some pieces always missing. And he lay very still and closed his eyes, pretending he was blind, and tried with all his might to hear a voice within himself. But the only thing he heard was the ticking of his watch on the table by the bed.

Shortly after dawn he was awakened by a great barking of dogs and he got up and looked out of the window. The Chevrolet was parked in the center of the yard and several spotted dogs were circling frantically around it in full cry. Two men with shot guns were standing near the diner looking on. They were hunters, he supposed and it crossed his mind to wonder what they could be hunting in an auto camp. He went back

to bed but the barking kept right on and, as he could not go to sleep again, he decided to get dressed and investigate the matter.

When he came into the yard the hunters had disappeared but the dogs were still yelping, sniffing here and there and tearing up the ground, all but one, a long-eared, liver-colored hound which was crouching underneath the car and panting with exhaustion. The balance of the pack charged at Mr. Littlejohn and sniffed him thoroughly but permitted him to pass and he went on into the diner. One of the hunters was sitting near the cash register with his feet cocked on a table and his gun across his lap.

"Good morning," Mr. Littlejohn said pleasantly and he glanced about and inquired for the steward.

"If you mean the owner of this shack," the hunter said with a distinctly southern drawl, "he's there." And he jerked his head toward the far end of the car.

Mr. Littlejohn looked in the direction indicated but it was still not very light inside the car and he saw no one at all. "I beg your pardon—" he began.

"There," repeated the hunter and pointed with his gun.

Mr. Littlejohn looked closely and then sat down quickly in a chair. The steward was hanging from a rafter with his feet just off the floor and the locomotive bell cord noosed around his neck. He was swaying just a little back and forth as if he might be leaning to the motion of a train.

"It's agin the law to take him down till the coroner gets here," the hunter volunteered. "My brother's gone to fetch him from Topeka."

"Yes, but why? Oh, *why*?" groaned Mr. Littlejohn.

"Why?" The hunter tilted back his chair. "Chickens," he said grimly.

"Chickens?"

"Yeah, chickens." He cut a chunk of plug tobacco and rolled it in his cheek. "I'm from Arkansaw, myself, but I reckon I can tell you all about it." And he went on to explain that the

farmers in the neighborhood, among whom was his brother, had been for several months the victims of petty thefts—mostly chickens which simply disappeared at night. It had gotten pretty bad, but no matter how they watched they couldn't catch the thief.

Well, to cut a long story short, he had come up from Arkansaw a few days ago on a visit to his brother, and it happened he had brought along his dog. He pointed through the door at the liver-colored hound which appeared to be asleep beneath the car. Ginger was a bloodhound and a honey; if he once got on a scent he'd stay with it till he died. The rest was very simple. Shortly before dawn he had heard the hound give voice. He roused his brother and they went out with a flash to count the chickens and found six pullets missing. They had also found this button. He showed it in his hand. It wasn't much, he said, but plenty for a dog like Ginger who had once run down a nigger from the burned end of a match. So they armed themselves and set out on the trail which had led them like an arrow to this spot.

"Good heavens!" Mr. Littlejohn exclaimed.

"Yeah." He spat tobacco juice across the floor. They had found the steward sitting at his desk behind the cash register with a lot of books spread out and papers filled with figures, and when they saw his face they knew he knew about it. But they hadn't said a thing except that they were looking for some chickens and a nigger. And the steward hadn't answered anything at all, not a single word—just sat there small and white and—and . . . He shook his head as if to shake the memory from his mind.

"But it might be a mistake," cried Mr. Littlejohn.

"It might be but it ain't." They had found the missing chickens in the icebox, just thrown in there in a heap like a man was in a hurry. The nigger'd only been a jump ahead of them, he guessed. And he was right here now, hiding like a rabbit in a hedge. But he couldn't get away—no fear of that, not with

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn, and he opened his eyes and wiped the perspiration from his face. The hunter was watching from the entrance of the diner.

"Mebbe you need a drink," he called.

"Oh, no," Mr. Littlejohn called back, and he got into the driver's seat and closed the door behind him.

"I'm back heah on de floor, suh."

Mr. Littlejohn did not turn his head or move a muscle of his face. "I do not know that you are there," he said. "I do not know anything about it. Do not speak again."

"Yassuh," the voice said meekly, and there was silence.

Mr. Littlejohn reflected. Ginger was underneath the car from which there was no possible escape. The hunter had gone back into the diner but, if he blew the horn for Patrick, he might come out again. No, there was nothing to be done but wait and hope that things might happen for the best. To while away the time he turned on the radio which responded promptly with the latest news.

"San Diego, California: While two hundred G men and armed deputies stormed an abandoned farmhouse near Amarillo, Texas, yesterday afternoon, in a futile effort to capture Black Beard, the outlaw stepped up to the paying teller's wicket in the Citizen's National Bank of San Diego, one thousand miles away from his pursuers, and escaped with seven thousand dollars in currency including a number of gold certificates recently apprehended by the Treasury Department in a safe deposit box, and which were, at the moment, awaiting shipment to the Treasury.

"Listeners are urged to be on the lookout for U. S. Treasury gold certificates which have the appearance of ordinary bank notes except that they are *yellow and not green.* If a gold certificate comes into your hands, notify the police immediately. Rewards for the capture of Black Beard, dead or alive, now total fifty thousand dollars. J. Edgar Hoover, when informed of the bandit's latest daring escapade, issued the follow-

ing statement from his hotel in Amarillo, Texas: 'I have nothing to say.' "

Mr. Littlejohn was panting with excitement. What a bandit! What a man! While the steel jaws of a trap closed around his throat, there he was a thousand miles away, black mustache and all. Well, it was a thrilling business, this tilting with the law, and he, Horatio Littlejohn, was tasting the forbidden fruit, himself.

There was now a great commotion in the diner with shouts and imprecations, and Patrick was projected through the door as though he had been hurled out by a catapult. The hunter stood behind him, leaning on his gun and breathing hard. Patrick picked himself up from the ground, dusted off his clothes and got into the car.

"Did you get something for breakfast?" Mr. Littlejohn inquired.

"Chicken," Patrick said. One of his eyes was already turning black but his face wore the vestige of a grin. He started up the car and backed around. There was a yelp of grief and protest, and Mr. Littlejohn looked back. Ginger was trotting at their heels.

"Faster," he commanded.

"Ginger!" yelled the hunter, and he came out a few steps, the wrathful expression on his face succeeded by one of incredulous amazement.

"Good-by," called Mr. Littlejohn and waved his hand, and to Patrick in a whisper, "Faster! Faster!"

"Ginger! What's got into you?" The hunter ran into the road. But the dog that had never lost a nigger in his life was not to be diverted now. His brooding eyes were fixed upon the car and his long ears scraped the pavement. "Ginger! Are you crazy? Come back here now! You hear me?"

They went around a curve and Mr. Littlejohn began to breathe again. He peeked out through the window in the back but Ginger was still coming. His tail stood straight out in the

wind and gobs of foam were blowing from his jowls. He was hanging on like death. "Faster! Faster!" Now they were gaining. Inch by inch and yard by yard they drew ahead.

"I'm doing sixty," Patrick said.

Ginger had met his Waterloo at last. He faltered, stumbled, and with a despairing yelp, revolved like a pinwheel in the air, skidded into the ditch, and lay there motionless.

"That mut is nuts," sneered Patrick who was watching in the mirror.

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. There was something about Ginger that evoked his admiration: a grim intensity and silent singleness of purpose which deserved to be rewarded with success. Was it all to count for nothing now?—and a lifetime of achievement to be washed out by defeat? Would his integrity be questioned and his motives misconstrued by an ignorant, doubting public? Would his noble spirit vanquish this disaster or his loyal heart be broken? To arrive at distinction was a very dangerous business for a dog or for a man. From the summit of a mountain there was no place left to go—no place but *down.* Oblivion was the shadow of a monument.

They passed a speeding car with three official-looking men in Stetson hats and a fourth one with a shot gun. Topeka disappeared behind them. They were once more in the country when a voice spoke out of nowhere.

"I got de misry in my laigs," it said.

"What the hell—" gasped Patrick, and he drove off the road into the ditch and stopped against a culvert.

"I been folded lak a jack knife—" A black wraith rose out of the depths and sank groaning on the seat. "My laigs won't wuk no more."

Mr. Littlejohn recovered his composure. "Henry," he said sternly, "this is a very serious affair."

"Yassuh, I knows it is," Henry agreed cheerfully. "But dey ain' a word of truf in what dem fellahs said. I ain' nevah stole a chicken in my life and it mus' be someone else." There was a

button missing from his coat. "I sweah to God I ain'." He raised his hand and some feathers fluttered from beneath his arm. "Now ain' it funny wheah dem feathas come from?"

Patrick interposed. He said they were in process of compounding a felony and there was nothing to be done but to drive back to Topeka and deliver the thief to the authorities.

Henry protested violently. It was all a mistake and he was not a thief at all. What did feathers prove? Pillows were stuffed full of them and they got onto your clothes as everybody knew. And why would he want to steal when he was working for a fine man like the Captain who gave him everything and had known him all his life?

"You ask de Captain about Henry," he concluded. "He tell you quick enuf."

Patrick laughed derisively. There was not a word of truth in anything that Henry said, and anyway the steward, if by "Captain" he meant him, was now dead and unable to answer any questions.

"De Captain daid?" The darky's eyes grew big and round and his face turned pale beneath the coal-black skin. "No, dat ain' so. De Captain back dah in de camp." He appealed to Mr. Littlejohn. "You tell me, suh."

Mr. Littlejohn related what had happened as gently as he could.

"Oh, Lawd! Oh, Lawd! Oh, blessed Lawd!" Henry began to sob and the tears rolled down his cheeks. It was all his fault, he guessed. He bounced up and down upon the seat and wailed so loudly that people stared from passing cars.

He had given up his job, he said, to come and help the Captain who had been a father to him all his life. Things had gone on for a time but business had been bad and one day there was nothing left to cook. The Captain had told him then that his money and his credit were exhausted, and he had broken down and cried and wished that he was dead. He, Henry, had cried too, and then he had gone out and tramped about the country

in despair, trying to think of something he could do to help his friend and benefactor. It was a moonlight night and he had walked and walked, without thinking where he went, until his feet began to hurt. And he had sat down to rest himself, not noting where he was, when he suddenly became aware of some chickens looking at him through the wires of a coop.

"Oh, Lawd! Oh, Lawd!" he howled. The Captain had told him it was wrong, but they cooked the chickens anyway. And then it had gone on and on and on. "De blessed Lawd have mercy on my soul!" His voice rose to a shriek, and a woman leaned out of a car to look.

"For God's sake—" Patrick pleaded.

"I doan' cah," screamed Henry, gesticulating wildly. "I open up my heaht and pour de evil from it. De wages of sin is heaped down on my haid and dat's all de wages dat I got." He choked with sobs. "De Captain daid, and I doan' cah what happen to me now. Jes' take me to de jail."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn, and he alighted from the car and regarded Henry thoughtfully. Patrick was trembling with impatience. In the eyes of the law they were chicken thieves themselves, and he started up the motor and began to turn around.

"Wait!" Mr. Littlejohn said firmly, and addressed himself to Henry. "We will not take you to jail, nor deliver you over to the machinery of the law which is singularly blind to correct interpretation of most matters brought before it."

"*What!*" shouted Patrick. But Mr. Littlejohn held up his hand for silence and went on:

"We will not take you to jail, for, although you have, in a social sense, done wrong, it seems to me that your offense has been induced by a rare and precious virtue—in a word, by nobility of heart." And he got into the back seat and motioned Patrick to drive on.

"Runaway niggers!" muttered Patrick underneath his breath, and added grimly that things like this had caused the Civil War.

"Hallelujah!" bellowed Henry. "I'm marchin' wid de Lawd." He bowed his head and seemed to be in prayer.

Mr. Littlejohn reflected. Human conduct was a complicated matter, but the law could not see beneath the surface. It demanded sternly, "What has this man *done*?" But it never questioned, "*Why?*" which was the thing that really mattered. If you could trace, from end to end, each thread that wove the pattern of your life, might there not always be a satisfactory answer? And where would *good* and *bad* be then? As moral precepts? As living facts deserving in themselves reward or punishment? What was good and what was bad?—and who could tell? Divested of their social implications did they exist at all? Were they any part of *life*, itself? He looked out at the prairie rolling away in gentle billows to the horizon. There was life and it was neither good nor bad; it *was*, and that was all.

After a while he got out his mouth organ and began with "Home Sweet Home." Henry raised his head and listened with critical attention, and, when opportunity presented, complimented Mr. Littlejohn on his performance.

"I'm afraid I'm a little rusty," Mr. Littlejohn confessed.

"No, suh, you sho' hot." Henry took a small mouth organ from his pocket and joined in the chorus of the "Suwanee River" with trills and variations which aroused Mr. Littlejohn's respect and admiration. Then they went on to the "Rhapsody in Blue," but Henry called a halt.

"Suh," he said, "it's de syncopation's bothahin' you." Mr. Littlejohn admitted that it was. "Yassuh, I see dat right away." And he went on to explain that syncopation did not originate in the fingers or the tongue but in the very marrow of the bones. "It come out from de inside, suh, and de place you gwin feel it first is right in de seat of de pants." Mr. Littlejohn was startled. "Now lemme show you what I mean, and you watch mighty close." He rolled his eyes and jerked his knees and bounced gently up and down. "We got to get de feelin' first. Um—Um— Yassuh, it coming now."

Suddenly he attacked the mouth organ as if it were an ear of corn and tore the Rhapsody to shreds. His eyes rolled back into his head; he bounced and swayed and twitched and jerked. Every muscle in his body seemed to take an active part and everything was working from his ears down to his toes. Mr. Littlejohn was spellbound until the piece concluded with an epileptic flourish.

"Dat's de way she goes," laughed Henry. "But de twitchin' in de seat is wheah she starts. Now let's take it kinda slow and I hep you all I can." He began to bounce again and Mr. Littlejohn bounced with him. "You tell me when you feel somethin' funny in de seat." Mr. Littlejohn bounced thoughtfully.

"I—I believe I do," he whispered.

"Dat's fine, but let's keep goin' for a while till de twitchin' get right smaht."

Mr. Littlejohn nodded and bounced on. He jerked his knees and tried to roll his eyes but he didn't feel quite sure about them.

"Now," cried Henry, "heah we go." And away they went. Mr. Littlejohn was wriggling like a python. He presently got tangled in a knot but skipped a dozen measures and boldly plunged ahead. Indeed he was leading in the stretch and finished like a whirlwind half a length ahead, breathless but elated.

"I really think I'm getting the idea," he said.

"Yassuh," chuckled Henry, "of co'se you is. And you nevah be mistaken if you wait for de twitchin' in de seat."

They stopped at a hot dog stand for lunch and had hamburgers with mushrooms. Patrick tried to act as if he were not with them and did not come around until it was time to pay the check.

The afternoon passed pleasantly. Henry related the history of his life. He had been born in Memphis but had never had a home or indeed lived anywhere, and he did not remember having parents. His early recollections were of roaming in the woods and catching cat fish on the levee. He had never gone

to school or been otherwise annoyed, but he had got religion when a boy and had kept it all his life. It was like an umbrella, he explained.

"You got it with you all de time but you nevah put it up unless it rains." And it did not rain too often. He had been married once or twice and he thought he had some children, but cooking on a diner left no room for family life. He had always loved the railroad but he didn't miss it much. It seemed as though he just liked everything, so if something disappeared there was always something else. "I started out with nothin' and I ain' got nothin' now." He chuckled. "So de way I figger is dat I ain' los' a thing."

"But, Henry, tell me this: has it been *fun*?"

"Fun?" Henry laughed until he shook. "Yassuh, it sho has."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn and sank into a reverie which presently resolved into a nap.

When he awoke the sun was setting and he was startled to observe that the aspect of the countryside had changed. There were no fertile fields nor clumps of waving cottonwoods but only yellow sand from which the tops of fence posts stuck out gauntily. Could this be the desert?

"No, suh," Henry said. "We in de dus' bowl now."

"The dust bowl!" It was a melancholy sight: no sign of life, of man or beast; at intervals, wretched and abandoned houses with sand drifted almost to the roofs. The wind was blowing and a murky yellow haze enveloped everything.

"I remembah how it was befoah." Henry shook his head. "I used to see it ridin' on de train, all green and pretty like. But de foolish folks done plow up all de grass and de land jes' blow away. Dey think dey gwine make things grow out heah, but de Lawd ain' figgered it like dat." He began to croon a plaintive, mournful hymn.

Mr. Littlejohn felt very much depressed as he watched the sun go down like a red, resentful eye. People were always plowing up things, trying to change the face of nature, to interfere

with *life*, and they frequently came up against the fact that the Lord hadn't figured it that way. But they rarely tried to understand the secret of the law that blocked their path. No, they went right straight ahead, stupidly and blindly, as moths fly to a flame, and wore their hearts away, and fought and bled and died in futile effort to impose their puny wills upon the will of God. And then there was a dust bowl. The world was full of dust bowls. Almost every human being had one somewhere in his life. He sighed and huddled closer in the corner of the seat.

Patrick stopped at an auto camp which did not resemble a railway train or boat or anything at all except an auto camp. It appeared to be doing a good business. Mr. Littlejohn introduced Henry as his valet and a pleasant-faced woman assured him with a smile that they had a place for valets in the back and that Henry could have dinner in the kitchen.

While he waited for his steak Patrick read aloud from the Topeka evening paper: "Ex-Dining Car Conductor Hangs Himself—Negro Chicken Thief Escapes." He glared at Mr. Littlejohn and turned the pages to the want ads. "Lost, strayed or stolen: Liver-colored bloodhound; male; answers to name of Ginger. Reward."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. He heard laughter in the kitchen and wished that he were there.

"I'm a working man," said Patrick, "a member of the proletariat, and I expect to be mistreated and oppressed, but there are limits." He threw the paper on the floor and recited his grievances as follows:

His hours were too long and his wages were too small; his meals were infrequent and irregular and not always suitable in quantity or quality; in the course of his employment he had several times been beaten without compensation for his injuries; he had also been bitten by spiders and by dogs; and had finally been involved in a criminal undertaking. He folded his arms and scowled at Mr. Littlejohn. All these abuses he had

suffered silently, but he would not suffer any more. If further irregularities occurred he would be compelled to submit his resignation.

"Patrick," said Mr. Littlejohn with amazed admiration in his voice, "you are the most rugged individualist that I have ever met."

"*What?*" gasped Patrick and his jaw dropped open.

"Yes," said Mr. Littlejohn, "*you are.*" And he excused himself and left the table.

Henry was waiting in his cabin when he got there. He was very stiff and formal and startled Mr. Littlejohn by addressing him as "Captain." He knew about this valet stuff, he said, having seen them in the movies. And he unpacked Mr. Littlejohn's valise—or more properly, the pockets of the duck coat—set out the toilet articles, and spread the pajamas, with a flourish, on the bed. He would take the shoes and coat to clean and brush. And at what time would the Captain take his breakfast?

"Why, at seven, I believe."

"At seben, yassuh." He paused at the door. "If you wish for service soonah, kindly ring de bell."

"The bell?" Mr. Littlejohn looked around. "Is there a bell?"

"I doan' guess dey is but de valets talk like dat." He could not repress a chuckle. "Anyway I wouldn' scacely heah it 'cause when I sleep, I sleep. And I wish de same to you, suh." He bowed from the waist and backed out of the door.

Mr. Littlejohn was still smiling when he got into bed. The Captain was dead. Long live the Captain! A whole philosophy of life packed into a nutshell. Volumes had been written that didn't say as much. The Captain was dead, *and now*—long live the Captain. Henry had expressed the idea faultlessly: he just liked everything, so, if something disappeared, there was always something else.

He turned out the light and pondered in the dark. Hildegarde and Luli, and Henry and the blind man—they had traveled a long way, those four. And again he saw the slender, boyish

figure, and felt her fingers on his arm, and heard her airy, careless voice: "If it isn't fun—what is it?" And Luli with the soft blond hair, and the laughing eyes that had never known defeat. "Who can see around the corner?" she had said. "Life is *now*. Let us enjoy each moment while we can." It had seemed so simple to them—not something to be fought for but just to be accepted. Yes, they had come by very different roads, those four, but they had come to the same place. And they told what they had found in very different words, but the things that they had found were all the same. He nodded to himself.

Of course life had a purpose and its purpose must be *growth*—accumulation of experience for the imperishable consciousness or soul—call it what you like. And if anything at all was required of human beings, it was that they should live with this purpose in their minds—in *awareness* of the wonder and the beauty of the world, not crying over milk that had been spilled nor anticipating spilling it, not dwelling in the future or the past, but being keenly and constantly alive in the *eternal living now*. Hum, well . . . He was really getting some place. If he could only hear that voice within himself . . . And it never crossed his mind that he had been listening to it all the time.

VIII

HE WAS AWAKENED BY HIS VALET'S voice.

"Good mawnin', Captain. Youah breakfas', suh." He put the tray down by the bed, rushed into the bath and turned on the water in the tub. "Youah bath is runnin', suh, but you bettah eat youah breakfas' while it's hot." He backed toward the door. "De shoes and de coat is comin' up."

"Oh, by the way—" said Mr. Littlejohn, and he explained that he had been unable to pay for his lodging of the previous night and would like to settle this account with Henry who seemed the natural person to receive it.

Henry shook his head. "Oh, dat's all right. De Captain—" He corrected himself hastily, "I mean de one dat's daid, nevah paid me any wages and I'd soonah let de mattah stan' dat way."

"But—"

"No, suh." He grinned and rattled money in his pocket. He was well supplied with funds, he said, having borrowed a quarter from the cook and won nine dollars off of Patrick shooting craps.

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. He tried to look displeased but failed.

"Yassuh," chuckled Henry. "Dem uppitty folks ain' no good at rollin' bones." He bowed and vanished.

After breakfast he reappeared and deftly packed the pockets of the duck coat. He said it was a mighty handy satchel and it was funny no one had thought of it before. If it did come into general use it would be a little hard on the porters and the

red caps who would have nothing left to carry. But that was the way the world went on and it wasn't any use to kick about it. Cooking was about the only job that had not been superseded by mechanical invention, and he guessed they'd get around to that in time. When they did it wouldn't bother him a bit. "No, suh, not a mite," he laughed, " 'cause I'd jes' as soon be settin' catchin' cat fish on de levee."

Patrick was waiting in the car. His face looked like a thunder cloud and he did not speak at all.

They were now on Highway 50 in the middle of the dust bowl. The sun was warm, the sky was blue, and the yellow haze had vanished. Mr. Littlejohn got out his mouth organ and was beginning some preliminary bouncing when he was horrified to see the figure of a woman standing in the road directly in the path of the car. She was waving something red.

"Stop!" she screamed as Patrick blew the horn and swerved around her. "Help!"

"Stop!" commanded Mr. Littlejohn. Patrick applied the brakes. "Back up!" He leaned out and saw a large house trailer parked in the ditch beside the road. The woman came running to the car. She was fairly young and buxom with a plain but eager face. The flag that she had waved looked like a bathrobe.

"I got to get a tow," she said distractedly in a shrill and nasal voice, and then she kept on saying it. "I got to get a tow. I mean I got to get a tow."

"Tow?" Mr. Little john said vaguely when she stopped for breath.

"Yes, *tow*." She gulped and her voice rose to a shriek. "I've been abandoned."

"Abandoned?" Mr. Littlejohn alighted from the car with Henry at his heels.

"That's what I mean. But I got to keep on going west. The spirits told me where to go."

"I beg your pardon——"

"He's went and took the car. He always said he would some

day. I never knew he'd went till I got up this morning. But I got to get out west the way the spirits said."

"Yes, but *who* went *where*?"

"My husband. I don't know where he went and I don't care. Back home to North Dakota maybe. We would of got out west but he was for stopping here and settled on a farm in the middle of the dust bowl, just like the fool he is, and we been two years starving. But the spirits told me to go on and yesterday we started. And now he's gone and took the car."

"Mebbe he gone to get some gas," suggested Henry hopefully.

"No he ain't gone for gas, he's gone for good." And she handed Mr. Littlejohn a scrap of paper on which had been laboriously penciled:

Dere Myra

I cant stand no more of it. You talk to much and theres to mutch spirits in the house. I shouldn of ever left N. Dak. but that was yure falt and yure spirits and I wouldn of been busted in the dust boul but for them. I aint going west no more. The spirits aint never done us no good but just busted up a happy home and if you will take kindly advise it is to cut out the spirit stuff and keep yure own mouth shut. Plese give love to children.

Yure affect husband
Peter Stumpvogle

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn.

Patrick got out of the car and took part in the discussion. He said they couldn't tow the trailer because they didn't have a hitch. But Myra disposed of this. She had a rope which would serve the purpose until they found a blacksmith shop where a suitable hitch could be constructed. Patrick examined the rope and said it was not strong enough; furthermore the Chevrolet was almost a total wreck and would not pull the trailer anyway. In conclusion he said that he was bound for California and had no more time to waste, and he got back in the car and started up the motor.

"California!" Myra shrieked. "That's the very place the spirits said to go."

"What she mean by 'sperits'?" inquired Henry anxiously.

"I don't know," sighed Mr. Littlejohn, and he was wondering in great perplexity how best to adjust the situation when an infant began to wail inside the trailer and, a moment later, a child came to the door—such an amazing child that even Patrick stared. She was five or six years old, with flaxen curls and big blue eyes and something that defies description: an elfin grace and wistful poise—a personality. Her faded little gingham dress clung to her like the petals of a flower, and she did not walk; she danced. A small brother was clinging to her hand and an even smaller dog romped playfully at her heels. And when she spoke her voice was like a song.

"The baby's wetted, mummy."

"Mirabel! My Mirabel!" screamed Myra. "Yes, darling, mummy's coming." From the doorway she confronted Mr. Littlejohn with fire in her eye. "You see I *got* to get a tow."

"Yes," said Mr. Littlejohn, "I see." And he ordered Patrick to come and hook the trailer to the car.

Patrick backed up savagely. He said it was a racket—the woman had no husband, the children had been rented, and the letter was a forgery. He tied the trailer on with Henry's help but he knew the rope would break and cause a wreck. Myra emerged with the baby in her arms.

"I got to get—" she started, but got into the front seat instead and dragged the small boy in beside her. Mirabel climbed into the back with the puppy in her lap, and they were off. It was a little crowded.

Myra kept on talking. The small boy's name was Peter for his father. He'd been born in North Dakota and was four. The baby was eight months and had been born here in the dust bowl. His name was Franklin Delano Stumpvogle. She explained how this had happened. The month that he was born they had killed six starving hogs and the government had paid for them in cash. So she thought that it was only fair to name him for the Pres-

ident. Mirabel was almost six. She was different from the others. She was a spirit child.

"What you mean by all dat *sperit* stuff?" said Henry.

Myra laughed. "I'm the seventh daughter of a seventh son," she said, "and I ain't like other people. I'm clairvoyant; I'm a medium. I read the future or the past as if it was right now. I can see right through a wall or a thousand miles away. I don't know how I do it but I can. I been like that all my life. Why when I was a child I like to scared myself to death. I hear things and I see things." She fixed her eyes on Mr. Littlejohn. "I seen you coming too but you didn't have no mustache." Mr. Littlejohn smiled weakly. He was genuinely startled.

"If you're so good at seeing things," sneered Patrick, "you might have seen your husband sneaking off."

"You think you're smart," snapped Myra, and she looked hard at Henry whose eyes were wide with wonder. "There's a chicken perching on your shoulder right this very minute." Henry gasped and jerked his head to look. "It's a spirit chicken," she explained. "You can't see it but I can."

"I doan' cah what it is," said Henry, "I doan' want it theah." And he brushed his shoulder violently.

"*You* can't brush it off." She laughed and waved her hand. "But *I* can. Now it's gone."

"I doan' like this kind of stuff," Henry muttered to himself.

But Myra went right on. Her uncle Ben had told her they were coming but he hadn't said just how or when. He was the one that was always urging her to keep on going west till she came to California but he never told her why so of course she didn't know. And she didn't need to worry about that because Uncle Ben always had a reason for everything he said and had never been mistaken about anything at all.

"Wheah is youah uncle Ben?" Henry asked suspiciously.

Myra laughed again. It was hard to tell, she said, because her uncle Ben had been dead for thirty years. Henry's dusky skin turned pale.

"Oh, look!" she screamed and pointed toward the western sky. "Look, Mirabel! The mountains! Hold Pickles up so he can see." Pickles was the dog. "Look, Peter! Ain't they grand! I'm so happy I could dance. Sing something, Mirabel."

Mirabel obliged with "California Here I Come." Henry began to grin and then to bounce, and both he and Mr. Littlejohn joined in the chorus with their mouth organs. The balance of the morning passed off pleasantly. They stopped at Trinidad for lunch and to change Franklin Delano who was particularly wet. And there they found a blacksmith shop and, to Patrick's great disgust, an arrangement was quickly made to have the trailer permanently hitched. At a near-by lunchroom they all had hamburgers except Franklin Delano who had a bowl of bread and milk, and Patrick who sat apart and ordered steak with onions.

"What's wrong with him?" Myra whispered hoarsely.

"He's a communist," Mr. Littlejohn replied.

"Oh! But why ain't he more sociable?"

"Well, I'm not quite sure," Mr. Littlejohn said thoughtfully, "but I suspect that he is completely unadapted to the collective life."

"Oh—" she nodded blankly. When she saw the check, which was a dollar and forty cents, she screamed that it was terrible extravagance. The trailer had a cook stove and an icebox and everything to make a happy home. It even had a shower bath. Peter had spent a whole year building it while the AAA was paying him not to farm the dust bowl. She loved to cook, she said, and they could start right in to housekeeping that night. She had some spirit recipes which she thought Mr. Littlejohn would like. If Henry would help her with the dishes . . .

"Yas'm," said Henry, "if dey ain' no sperit stuff."

"But the spirits are your friends."

"Mebbe dey is and mebbe dey ain'." Henry shook his head. "But I ain' gwin fool wid dem nohow." And he took the children and the dog and went out to the car.

"I beg your pardon," ventured Mr. Littlejohn, for he was determined to get to the bottom of a matter which was uppermost in his mind, if a bottom could be found. "I beg your pardon, but I believe you mentioned that you had seen me coming."

"I sure did," squealed Myra, stuffing a final spoon into F.D.'s dripping mouth. "I seen you just as plainly as I see you now, but you didn't have no mustache. You were hairless as a baby." She squinted at him critically. "I like you better with it. It sort of helps you somehow." It might have been a month ago; she couldn't quite remember. He had walked in through the wall and stood there looking at her. There was something else about it that she hadn't told before because it sounded silly. "You had a toothbrush in your hand and a tube of Rosydent."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn.

It was probably a symbol, Myra thought. The spirits were always doing things like that, and the only trouble was that a person couldn't tell what the symbols were about. It didn't mean a thing to her. She couldn't bear the taste of Rosydent and wouldn't have a tube inside the house.

"Yes, I know," nodded Mr. Littlejohn. He had never liked the taste of it himself.

The caravan departed on Highway 85. The younger children fell asleep and Myra told a story. It seemed that she had had another child between Mirabel and Peter—a boy who died in infancy and had been known as Brother. Of course he hadn't really died and kept growing in the spirit world just like he had been here. He often came to play with the children and their toys.

"Yes," interjected Mirabel, "and he dragged my Jumbo on the floor and scratched him something awful."

"Now, darling," cautioned Myra, "you must be nice to Brother." She explained that Jumbo was a wooden elephant.

"He wants it for his own," Mirabel said tearfully. "And he says he'll take it some day."

"Mummy's darling mustn't mind——"

"But it's mine," wailed Mirabel.

Patrick turned his head. "I am getting to the limit," he said thickly.

Henry opened the window and took a long deep breath. "Captain, suh," he pleaded, "what is all dis stuff about?"

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn, "I have been wondering——"

Myra rattled on but he no longer listened. The Rockies loomed around them in grand and awful majesty but he no longer saw. He was occupied with wondering. Uncle Ben and Brother—they might be or might not. There was nothing evidential in these stories. But she had seen him coming—had seen him *without a mustache*. Why not without a head or arm or leg—without an eye or ear or nose? *Why mustache?* The arm of coincidence was long but how far must it stretch to embrace this present matter? No doubt a mathematician could calculate the chances which must run into millions. And how far could a theory of coincidence be stretched before some other explanation became more reasonable and likely? To account for a phenomenon on the basis of coincidence was, in fact, to beg the question and not account for it at all. Coincidence was simply a scientific pigeonhole into which disturbing problems could be slipped. No. He shook his head. It was too easy.

Then there was the tooth paste—a symbol, Myra thought, which didn't mean a thing to her, but it did mean something all the same. And if tooth paste were admitted as coincidental too, then still why not Pebeco or Kolynos or half a hundred others? *Why Rosydent?* How much further must coincidence be stretched to cover all these factors? Light years of numbered chances would be involved in such a computation. No, it simply wouldn't do. Clairvoyance was less strain on your credulity. It was actually more *reasonable* and *likely*.

Peter woke up and wanted a banana but Patrick would not stop. Myra watched her chance and turned the switch key, and the car rolled to a stop near a roadside grocery store.

"You ain't in a hurry." She grinned and pointed to the key. "You're just mean. There!" She thrust the sleeping infant onto Patrick's lap. "You hold Franklin Delano till I come back." And she dragged Peter from the car and went into the store, pausing at the door to scream that there was more than one way to kill a cat.

Patrick swore, and then suddenly he yelled, dropped the baby on the seat and plunged out of the car.

"What is it? What's the matter?" Mr. Littlejohn asked anxiously.

"I know," piped Mirabel. "The baby's wetted him."

It was true. Patrick was soaking wet and pale with fury.

Henry picked up the howling child. "Now, doan' you cry no moah. I gwin to tend to you mysef." And he got out of the car and went into the trailer.

"This is too much," said Patrick in a hoarse, unnatural voice.

Mr. Littlejohn could not repress a smile nor resist a witticism. He said that to be "wetted" was unpleasant, but, considering the source to be Franklin Delano, there was a compensatory feature which should appeal to any communist, viz., that the wetting had been done by holy water.

Patrick gnashed his teeth and stamped his feet. He spoke disrespectfully of the President, who was, he said, a Tory and a pirate. He catalogued his grievances again: a monumental record of abuses which were certainly condoned if not actively sanctioned by administration policies.

"No!" he concluded with great violence. "I will not submit to further exploitation. I'm done. I want my time."

"Are you serious?" Mr. Littlejohn was startled.

"Am I serious?" snarled Patrick. And he threw his hat upon the ground and jumped on it.

"And you would really leave me here—marooned in the wilderness with three helpless children and a woman and a valet?"

"Yes," roared Patrick, and he added that "women and children first" was no part of the doctrine of an enlightened state.

"Hum—" sighed Mr. Littlejohn, and he counted out the wages which had been agreed upon. But then there was an argument as Patrick contended he was entitled to be paid the nine dollars he had lost shooting craps with Henry.

"But that was a game of chance," expostulated Mr. Littlejohn.

But Patrick said it wasn't. Shooting craps with a nigger was not a game of chance but a method of extortion, and, as he had been robbed of his money in the course of his employment by another employee, he was clearly entitled to reimbursement. Mr. Littlejohn demurred that he could not understand this line of reasoning.

"If you were a proletarian, you'd understand it quick enough," said Patrick, and muttered that he had no time to waste so would take four and a half and call it square.

"No," Mr. Littlejohn said sternly, "that would merely leave the issue in the air." And he added that it seemed to be the custom of the day to settle many questions in this fashion with the consequence that none of them were settled. While such a course might have the virtue of expediency, in the long run it was sure to occasion confusion and disaster. "No," he repeated with finality, "let us not evade the issue by a compromising attitude but rather face it boldly and abide by the result. I owe you nine dollars or I owe you nothing, and I am firmly convinced that the latter is the case."

"All right, all right," groaned Patrick, and he counted his wages and put the money in his pocket. "But we'll have *our day* some time."

"When you do," smiled Mr. Littlejohn, "I suspect it will be raining."

Patrick turned his back and walked away without another word.

Myra returned. She had bought a loaf of bread and some veal to make a goulash, and Peter was munching a banana. Mr. Little-

john explained the situation in a few well-chosen words. The caravan no longer had a driver and its mobility was threatened. He pointed down the road to where Patrick was sitting on a fence post with his trousers in the sun.

"I can drive," screamed Myra. "You just watch me." She climbed into the front beside Henry and Franklin Delano, clashed the gears and jammed the throttle to the floor. "Nobody never taught me; the spirits showed me how." They were always right beside her, she declared, and often did the steering if she got in a tight place. "I don't even have to look." She turned her head to smile at Mr. Littlejohn and they grazed a six-ton truck.

"Hol' on a minute," Henry gasped.

"Don't worry." She skidded off the shoulder of a curve and back onto the road. "Why say, I could drive to California with my eyes shut." She had driven for hours in a trance when she didn't know a single thing about it. Uncle Ben had been riding with her then.

"Mebbe so," said Henry, "but dey ain' nobody in heah now but us."

Mr. Littlejohn resumed his interrupted meditation in the field of extra-sensory perception. She had seen him coming a month before he came, before the bare idea had crossed his mind—carrying in his hand the wretched symbol of his wasted life—and, as he really was, without a mustache. The precognitive and clairvoyant eye eliminated time and space. Yes, but *how*?

Volumes had been written on the subject which denied the phenomenon completely or explained it in terms which required explanation. It had proved a nasty peg to fit into the mechanistic scheme and the subject was not popular at scientific conference tables. The learned doctors started with the premise that the mind was a physical affair, a function of the brain. But was it? If you did not know better, you might reasonably assume that the music which proceeded from a radio, originated there inside the box, was created by the tubes in the machine. Well,

suppose the brain to be something like a radio, a reproducing apparatus—might this not shed light upon the mystery? Hum . . . Yes, it might and did.

The thing became then, in effect, a reasonable aspect of the process of escaping from yourself, from the narrow cell in which you were confined—into a wider field of observation. It was no more nor less than floating freely and awarely in the sea of consciousness—like a swimmer or a traveler on a ship. And you brought back to your cell when the cruise came to an end, the souvenirs collected on the voyage—things picked up here and there, dependent on your taste, your receptive capacity in fact. As a rule the tourists came back home with undistinguished gadgets which served no better purpose than to litter up the house, but there were a discriminating few who remembered the beauty of the sea, the color of a sunset, the loveliness and mystery of strange lands. One encountered and brought back a great idea, and another brought a symphony or painting. But there were many who returned with empty hands or with nothing more important than a recipe for goulash or the picture of a man without a mustache. He smiled and nodded to himself.

Due to many limitations in themselves the travelers didn't always see things clearly nor correctly report what they had seen, and the margin of error was enormous. But *everything was there* in that spaceless, timeless sea. And if you were among the fortunate ones who sometimes took a trip, you might see what you looked for, and might bring back what you wanted providing you were big enough to carry it. "Yes," he said so loudly that Pickles woke and barked. It was absurdly simple once you got the premise ironed out. He glanced at his watch and, noting that it was time to get the news, asked to have the radio turned on.

There was nothing new on the San Diego front. J. Edgar Hoover had arrived by plane and established headquarters at the U. S. Grant Hotel. He refused to make a statement and it

looked as though the G men were for once completely baffled. Film circles in Hollywood were alarmed at the outlaw's proximity and many of the stars were rushing to Palm Springs. The public was urged to be on watch for U. S. Treasury gold certificates which were *yellow* and not green.

Myra laughed. She said her uncle Ben could find Black Beard in a moment. He had once found a thimble which Mirabel had dropped into the well. He was also very good at predicting the weather and told her in advance when it would rain.

"Dis chile is soakin' wet again," Henry interrupted ruefully, "and I wish youah uncle Ben had tol' you about dat."

They stopped while Franklin Delano was changed and Henry sunned his lap. A shiny Packard roadster went by them like a shot and someone yelled and waved. It was Patrick in the rumble seat with a broad grin on his face.

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. In a rumble he had come and in a rumble he had gone. Well, life was like that. He felt a twinge of melancholy and looked out at the landscape. The sun was setting in a sea of gold which rippled back through turquoise waves to a vault of indigo. The earth was crimson and scattered here and there were fantastic crimson mountains with grotesque purple shadows on their flanks. And there were clumps of aspens which looked like orange splotches on a painter's palette. This was New Mexico—the fabled West at last. All the colors of the spectrum melting, blending, moving, changing, shifting—proclaiming the exhaustless energy of life. It was dazzling, disconcerting, almost too much for human eyes to bear; it brought a lump into your throat and sent a shiver down your spine—the thought that you, yourself, were part of that.

They stopped at an auto camp on the edge of Albuquerque. There was a parking place for trailers with rustic chairs and tables and grills for outdoor cooking. Myra said that it was perfect. She bade Henry build a fire for the goulash and carelessly observed that Mr. Littlejohn need not assume the expense

of a cabin for himself as, now that her husband had abandoned her, the trailer contained an extra bed to which he would be welcome. Mr. Littlejohn blushed to the crown of his head. He thanked her for her thoughtfulness but feared that it would crowd them. He almost ran.

"It's up to you," she screamed, "but it's criminal to waste money."

The proprietor, a meek-looking man, installed Mr. Littlejohn in a comfortable cabin. He said, with an admiring snicker, it was the only way to travel—a cabin for yourself and a trailer for the family. There would be a whole lot less divorce if married life was carried on that way. A woman's voice called, "Oswald!" and he hurried to the door. "It's the way that you get started," he said sadly. "If a fellow had a chance to do it over—" He sighed as he went out.

"Yes," mused Mr. Littlejohn, "the way that you get started, and I had better be careful about that." He unpacked and took a bath and had barely finished with his toilet when Henry came to summon him to dinner.

"Captain, suh," he said with an air of great relief, "dey ain' a mite of sperit stuff about de goulash and if she got dat recipe from her uncle Ben, he mus' of stole it from Fred Harvey."

The table was set for four. Franklin Delano had been fed and put to bed and Henry did the serving in his best professional manner. "We have ox-tail soup," he said, and, "would you wish youah coffee now or latah, Captain?" An electric bulb in a Chinese lantern hung above the table from the limb of a big tree, and the embers in the grill glowed warm and red. The food was good and the setting was delightful.

Myra chattered shrilly. Be it ever so humble there was no place like home. They didn't need to worry about food, excepting meat and bread, as the trailer was stocked with canned goods for a month. Uncle Ben had made a point of that but refused to give a reason. He was sometimes very stubborn. Peter, her husband, had not liked Uncle Ben and had spoken of him shame-

fully and consistently refused to take advice. It was jealousy, she thought, as Peter had a jealous disposition and had once pursued a farm hand with a knife for no reason at all. The man had merely winked his eye at her. She looked at Mr. Littlejohn and said he had nice eyes—sort of warm and—something.

Henry changed the plates and poured the coffee. "For dessert we have apricots and cookies," he announced.

Myra went on talking. She had married very young, before she really knew what marriage meant, but it was in the spring and . . . She sighed. Still she couldn't really say that she regretted it, not with Mirabel, the angel child, and the other little darlings. Peter was fast asleep with his head upon the table and Mirabel was nodding.

"I guess I bettah take dem off to bed," said Henry.

She nodded. "Kiss mummy, darling angels. And kiss our good kind friend." They both kissed Mr. Littlejohn. "Ain't they the sweetest things!" She rattled on. Peter *was* their father, but—well, Mirabel was different. She was a spirit child.

"I, er, beg your pardon—" Mr. Littlejohn said doubtfully.

Myra blushed and hastened to explain. She didn't mean something sacrilegious. No, indeed, nothing of that kind at all. Mirabel had been born in the customary way without active intervention from the spirits. But for months before the child arrived . . . She hesitated and looked down at her plate. It was difficult to put it into words, but—for months before the baby came, someone had sat beside her bed night after night—*someone* so important that—well, she couldn't bring herself to say his name but would leave Mr. Littlejohn to guess.

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn.

"Yes," breathed Myra softly. And so while Mirabel was Peter's child in the ordinary sense, she was also the child of *someone else* whose name they need not mention. She gathered up the dishes and took them in to Henry, and came back with a tin trumpet which she put down on the table. "I better see if Uncle Ben's around," she said, "and find out what he wants

me to do next." She snapped off the light and sat down facing Mr. Littlejohn across the table. It was dark and rather chilly; the embers in the grill were dead. "Now don't you be scared of anything you hear or see." She took hold of his hand and pressed it reassuringly. "Just remember that the spirits are your friends."

"Oh, yes," Mr. Littlejohn agreed. He was curious but nervous.

There were spirits all around them, Myra said, but they didn't always care to be annoyed. Sometimes they were pretty short and snappy, just like people anywhere. And again they would laugh and tell you jokes.

"There!" she said abruptly. "Don't you smell it?" And she added, "Thank you, friends."

"Hum—" Mr. Littlejohn sniffed thoughtfully. Yes, he did smell something now—a scent of flowers. And suddenly it grew until the air was drenched with it.—It was roses—no—gardenia —or was it heliotrope? It was all of these and others, fading one into another. And then, a moment later, it was gone.

"Spirit flowers," Myra said. "They often bring them at the start." And she explained that different spirits had their favorite flowers and so, if there were many of them present, there were many different scents. "You'll be feeling cold spots next," she added cheerfully.

"I beg your pardon—" Mr. Littlejohn began, but stopped abruptly because he felt a cold spot on his ankle. It was not imagination; it was definite, unmistakable—like an evaporating breeze—exactly like a band of menthol. It spread along his leg up to his knee. And now there was another on his wrist. "I—I do," he stammered, "but—but what——"

"Ectoplasm." Myra laughed. It was slipping through the flesh out of his body and it was always cold like that when it crossed the sensitive surface of the skin. Often you could see it in the dark like lumps of luminous, transparent dough. "They use it to materialize," she said.

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. He was getting cold all over with a realistic chill.

Pickles growled and crawled away from underneath the table. Myra laughed again. The dog was just like Peter; he had no use for spirits. "Hush!" she whispered sharply. Mr. Littlejohn caught his breath and stiffened. The trumpet was moving on the table. He could hear the tin edge rolling back and forth, as if some palsied hand was struggling hard to lift it. And then the rattle of the tin was still. The trumpet was no longer on the table; it was somewhere in the air. He couldn't have sworn that he saw it, but he knew that it was there.

"Thank you, friends," chirped Myra. She remarked that the trumpet was floating in the air above her head. Now it was touching the amber beads she wore around her neck. Now it was gone. "Don't be frightened if it touches you," she cautioned.

"Oh, no—" said Mr. Littlejohn. He could hear Henry singing in the trailer and wished that he were there. Then something riffled through his hair and touched his neck as gently as a kiss. "It—it did—" he gasped.

"That's fine." And she asked if Uncle Ben was anywhere around.

A voice spoke through the trumpet in reply and said something that sounded like "Heap good."

"Oh, it's you," said Myra brightly. And she explained, aside, that the ghostly visitor was not Uncle Ben but an Indian known as Mike who often turned up first to start things off. "And how are things with you?" she asked.

"Heap good," was the reply.

"That's fine. And how are all the other friends?"

"Heap good."

"That's fine—just fine," said Myra.

There was a pause. It occurred to Mr. Littlejohn that the conversation did not seem to be getting anywhere, but he reflected

that conversations rarely did. The banality of ghostly communications was not, as so many people thought, a reflection on their authenticity, but actually tended to confirm the survival of human personality.

"And how is Uncle Ben?" continued Myra.

"Heap good."

"That's fine. Is he around?"

"No, but—but—" It seemed to choke and became unintelligible.

"Do you mean there's some other friend that wants to talk?"

"Heap good," enthusiastically.

"Well, where is he? Put him on."

"No—no ——"

"Do you mean he doesn't want to talk to me?"

"Heap good," decisively.

"Well, does he want to talk to that man over there?" Mr. Littlejohn shuddered apprehensively, but the voice was quick and positive on this point. "Who does he want to talk to then?"

"Hen—hen—hen—" It choked.

"Hen—" repeated Myra irritably. "Are you trying to be funny?"

"Perhaps—" suggested Mr. Littlejohn, and was startled to find that his teeth were chattering slightly. "Perhaps it—it wants to talk to Henry."

"Heap good! Heap good!" And the trumpet rapped the table smartly.

"Why, sure," said Myra, and she raised her voice and called, "Henry, come here!"

Mr. Littlejohn said nothing; he was speechless. Something was happening over there beyond the table end in the blackness of the night—something luminous like phosphorus was developing a form. He blinked his eyes and felt the icy chills run up and down his spine.

"Yas'm?" answered Henry from the door.

"There's someone out here wants to talk to you."

"Somebody want to talk to me?" He came groping through the dark.

Mr. Littlejohn tried desperately to speak but his throat was so dry that not a sound came from it. All the moisture in his body was oozing through his skin. That luminous, transparent form which came and went like a wisp of fog wind-blown in the moonlight—but unmistakable . . . Yes, there he stood, just as he had stood that other night, recommending "Our Chicken Maryland"—just as he had stood and recommended all his life—his head dropped a little to one side to interrogate the passenger—his figure swaying slightly to the motion of the train—the faint obsequious smile that had frozen on his face through all the years of wearing it . . .

"Henry—" Another voice was speaking through the trumpet with horrid, strangling effort. "Henry——"

"Who dat callin' me?"

"Henry—forgive me——"

"Who dat? What say?"

"Go back—to the railroad——"

"Who talking to me now?"

"Look!" said Myra. "Look!"

"Look how? Look wheah? I cain' see nothin' in de dahk."

"Yes, you can. Look *there*!"

"I—I doan' see nothin'—" Henry stuttered. There was a momentary pause. "*Whe-e-e-e-e-e—*" It sounded like escaping steam; no banshee ever uttered a more terrifying wail.

The trumpet clattered on the table; the apparition vanished. Mr. Littlejohn stumbled to his feet, found the swinging light and turned it on. "Henry!" he shouted. "Henry!" He ran across the yard. Oswald was standing on the lunchroom porch smoking a cigar. "Have you seen my valet?" he asked breathlessly.

"Your what?"

"My—my colored man."

Oswald said that something had just gone by with a tremendous "swush." It might have been a colored man. He didn't

know. He had thought it was a bat. It had gone across the highway and down the railroad tracks toward town.

Mr. Littlejohn ran across the road and down the track. The headlight of a locomotive, standing at the station, lighted up the right of way, but there was not a soul in sight. Still he ran on as fast as he could go. The bell tolled and the whistle blew a melancholy blast; the train was coming toward him and he ran into the ditch to wait till it should pass. It came on slowly, chuffing, snorting, red fire flaring from its belly.

The engineer was leaning from the cab. The baggage man was standing in the open door; he closed it with a bang as he went by. The club car came and went—well-dressed men and women sitting at their ease, and a roly-poly porter in immaculate white coat. The Pullmans glided by at a smooth and leisured pace. Some of the blinds were closed, but some were open—the gleam of a white shoulder, the outline of a breast beneath pink satin . . . Heigh-ho! Next time try the train. There *was* something warm and snug about a Pullman car.

Now the diner came along, but dinner was over and the tables half dismantled. The waiters were putting things away. But were they? They were not rolling up the tablecloths and bustling back and forth. They were gathered in a group around a table, black faces looking, listening. *What?* Could it be and was it possible? He ran along the ditch beside the train. Yes, there was no mistake. It was Henry sitting there. He was talking; he was telling them about it. He had really seen a 'hant'; he had just come from a ghost. Their eyes were big and round; they were hanging on his words . . .

The whistle blew again; the wheels were turning faster. The car slid by—was gone. The green red tail lights flickered from the observation platform.

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. If something disappeared there was always something else. Yes, well . . . He walked back slowly with his eyes upon the sky. He had never known there were so many stars.

IX

"AIN'T IT A SCREAM!" MYRA SAID AT breakfast. "Here I am almost living with a man and I don't know his name."

"I do," piped Mirabel. "It's Mister Humpty Dumpty."

Myra looked shocked, but Mr. Littlejohn said, smiling, that the child was not far wrong; his name was Humphrey—Humphrey Blackjohn. He had selected Blackjohn, after much deliberation, in preference to Littlebeard.

In reply to further questions he said he came from Utica, New York, where he had been in business from which he had recently retired on account of his age and the condition of his health for the benefit of which he was now traveling. He was a bachelor, he added as severely as he could, and he lied about his age which he gave as sixty-one.

"It ain't possible," shrieked Myra, and she leaned across the table and scrutinized him closely. "Why, there ain't a speck of gray in your mustache." She said he didn't look a day over forty-five and appeared to be as healthy as an ox.

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. He was both pleased and alarmed, and, though he had not finished with his coffee, he excused himself and went to pay the bill.

When he returned the caravan was hitched and ready to depart. Peter and Mirabel and Pickles were in the back, and he got into the front with Franklin Delano upon his lap. Myra spread a piece of oil-cloth on his knees. "Just in case—" she said. And they were off.

The day was fine; the sun was warm; the air like nectar. Red

mountains stabbed their jagged peaks into a cloudless sky. Indians squatted on the ground before silly-looking booths where pottery and blankets and silver turquoise gadgets were on sale to passing tourists. They stared with stolid eyes and did not seem to care that no one stopped. Mirabel and Peter exclaimed with rapture at these unfamiliar sights, and Myra went on talking. But Mr. Littlejohn was not attending. He could not play his mouth organ and he could not smoke his pipe, but he could and did reflect.

He reviewed, in careful detail, the supernatural aspects of the previous night's events. "Supernatural" was not the word, he thought. Nothing could be supernatural in a strictly literal sense. *Supernormal* was a better designation.

There was first the item of the "spirit flowers," scents that came and went in the open air beneath a tree in the mountains of New Mexico at nine o'clock at night. It was alleged that they proceeded from discarnate bouquets, but was there any evidence of that? No, there wasn't. Well, was there any evidence to contradict that theory? Not a shred, since by no known natural law could the matter be explained. Was it possible that he had been the victim of hypnosis? But this was just a name for some other unknown factor. Whether or not you could identify the source, *the phenomenon remained.*

Item 2: The "bands of cold" upon his wrist and ankle. It was alleged that an ectoplasmic substance was escaping from his body. But was there any evidence? He decided that his analysis of Item 1 would do for Item 2, and he tagged it with scientific brevity, "Phenomenon observed but source unknown."

Item 3: The movement of the trumpet on the table and its suspension in the air. Subhead A: Why had Pickles growled? Item 4: The soft, caressing touch upon his neck. Item 5: Two voices which spoke through the trumpet or from somewhere, and one of them *had sounded* like the steward's with a rope around his neck. After long and careful scrutiny he disposed of these three items: "Phenomena observed but source unknown."

Item 6: That luminous, transparent form like a wisp of wind-blown fog . . . He shuddered at the memory. The ectoplasmic substance materialized in human shape—*but was it?* And if not that, *then what?* He considered the matter for some time before he gummed the label in its place: "Phenomenon observed but source unknown." It might be spirits or it mightn't.

They stopped for a quick change for Franklin Delano, but Mr. Littlejohn continued deep in thought. It was argued by the skeptics that the spirits were a dull and uninspiring lot. But what did that establish? What could anybody say who suddenly awoke and found that he was dead? What other than the sort of thing that he had said in life? "I am getting on just fine and everything's okay, and I hope you are the same—" or words to that effect—with love to Bill and mother. If his outlook had been narrow, it would be no broader now. If he had been dull and prosy, he continued so in death. In addition, it was generally conceded that language was a clumsy mechanism and more likely to obscure than to reveal. The most profound and beautiful emotions were rarely well translated into words, and a heart that was bursting with love or joy or grief, often found no more adequate expression than "Hello" or "Good-by."

To sum the matter up, admitting the deceased to be exceptional, and assuming that he found himself with new and quickened faculties in a strange expanded world, yet how should he transcend the limitations of a human medium, and of human thought and language, to describe his situation? It might be, no doubt was, a Herculean undertaking. And you couldn't condemn the whole theory of survival because you were dissatisfied with the messages you got. But, on the other hand, if ethereal experience was bound to be transmuted, distorted and deformed, by mundane communication until it had no more significance than the mischievous pranks of boys on Halloween—then what was the good of it at all? Who could sift the grain out of the chaff?

But if soul could speak with soul without obstacle of medium

or of language, without recourse to trumpets or automatic writing or ectoplasmic apparitions, without the accessories which occasioned so much mirth and were fraught with so much error . . . Yes, if soul could blend with soul without intermediary . . . He started and exclaimed beneath his breath. Well, of course, they could and did. There was the case of Luli and the blind man for example. He was very much excited; the whole thing was clearing up as if by magic. If you wanted to communicate with those who had gone on and really understand the things they had to say, you must meet them on their own ground, or at least must go halfway, must yourself approach the veil which divided the living from the dead.

But first you must escape from your individual cell—in any way, by any means you could—into the universal sea of life—of consciousness. It came right back to that. And then you might begin to hear the voice within yourself—the voices of the dead which spoke out of your soul and whose guidance you could trust. Yes, then you would be listening to the dead. And in the excitement induced by this revelation, he let loose of Franklin Delano who slid onto the floor with a protesting howl.

"I—I'm very sorry—" He hastily gathered up the baby. "I was thinking about something else."

Myra laughed. She said there was an old man with white hair and beard standing on the running board looking in the window. Mr. Littlejohn jerked his head to look and almost dropped the child again. "It's a spirit," she went on. "He's got a sailor cap like a captain on a ship." Mr. Littlejohn gulped. The Commodore *had worn* such a cap when yachting on the Sound. "Now he's smiling at you and nodding his approval. I guess that it's your father."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. Cap or no cap, he suspected it was not the Commodore who had never smiled at him or approved of him at all. Still, in all these years the old man might have changed. He sighed; he didn't think it likely.

"Now he's gone," screamed Myra and went right on from

where she had left off, recounting the strange story of a spirit hen which laid spirit eggs. She had seen them in the haymow in the dark but no one could ever find them in the daytime.

They passed through Winslow, Arizona, and stopped for an al fresco lunch in a pleasant, sunny spot on the far edge of the town. After lunch Myra suggested that she and Mr. Littlejohn drive back to the town to purchase bread and meat and several other things which were lacking in the commissary. The children could stay here with the trailer and Mirabel could tidy up the lunch things and have everything all set when they got back.

On the way into town she sighed and leaned against him. Just him and her, she murmured, riding in the car without the children. It was comfortable and nice; it made her think about her honeymoon.

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn perspiring freely.

She drove the length of the main street, watching out for bargains; then turned around and stopped before a cash and carry store. "I'll get the bread and things in here," she said. "There's a butcher shop across the street; you go and get the meat."

Mr. Littlejohn strolled across the street and went into the shop. The butcher, a large, imposing-looking man, was cutting up a beef. He glanced up and said he'd be finished in a minute. There was a radio on the counter and the commentator for the Boston Symphony was making an announcement. The next selection, he said, would be a composition in F minor entitled "Vision of Summer" by a Viennese composer whose work was just beginning to receive critical attention . . .

"Now," said the butcher, leaning with hamlike fists upon the counter.

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Littlejohn. "I—I would like some meat."

"What kind of meat? Veal, lamb, pork, beef?"

"Beef," suggested Mr. Littlejohn.

"Sirloin, tenderloin, porterhouse? Rib roast? Short ribs?"

"Why—er—" He had never bought a piece of meat before. "Do you have hamburger?"

"Hamburger. How much?"

But Mr. Littlejohn was ready for him now. "Fifteen pounds," he said without a moment's hesitation. He had first thought of twenty.

"*What?*" The butcher stared. "Did you say *fifteen* pounds?"

"Yes, I did." He did not like the butcher's manner. "But you better make it twenty."

The butcher muttered something as he whirled the meat grinder, but Mr. Littlejohn was listening to the radio. He had heard the name of Albert Becker.

"—Albert Becker, the blind Viennese composer, has been for many years a resident of this country where his work has been ignored. But recognition can be withheld from him no longer, and indeed some critics now compare his genius with that of another famous Austrian, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. They share the same intellectual delicacy and perfection coupled with the tragic urge . . ."

"Twenty pounds of hamburger," said the butcher with an air of adding, "and I hope it chokes you." And he slammed a large package on the counter.

"Thank you," Mr. Littlejohn said absently, and, still listening to the radio, he thumbed through a roll of bills and handed the butcher a twenty-dollar U. S. Treasury gold certificate which was *yellow* and not green.

The butcher turned as yellow as the bill. He dropped it, picked it up, looked at Mr. Littlejohn and then tried to act as though he hadn't. His mouth was dry; he could not speak; he could not even swallow. He leaned against the cash register but everything was swimming and he couldn't count the change, and his hand was trembling so that he dropped it on the floor. When he stooped down to pick it up he wanted to remain there.

"Thank you," smiled Mr. Littlejohn. He didn't count the change which was wrong and in his favor. "Good afternoon—"

And he picked up his parcel and strolled through the door. He had not noticed anything unusual. He was thinking very hard of Albert Becker.

Myra was waiting in the car. Five minutes later they had picked up the trailer and the children and were once more gliding westward on Highway 66. And ten minutes later the wires of the land were burning up.

Myra went on talking but Mr. Littlejohn turned on the radio. "Vision of Summer"—it was very charming music. If you listened closely you could hear birds singing in the tree outside the window, and you could almost smell the scent of earth and flowers and the fresh breeze from the sea. Yes, it was all there—all that he had seen with Luli's eyes—the blind man's vision of a summer day. The music changed its mood, rose sharply to a harsh and tragic phrase, and ended there. Summer was over and the vision broken. There was a tumult of applause.

"It's pretty," Myra screamed, "but kind of sad."

"Hum—" Mr. Littlejohn turned off the radio. Albert Becker who had gone out in the street, not alone and unafraid, with a tin cup in his hand and a placard on his breast, and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart . . .

Five motor cops swooped by with screaming sirens. They did not pause or even turn their heads. They were not looking for a trailer with a Kansas license plate.

The children were asleep and he himself was nodding. Amadeus was a funny name, and so was Wolfgang—just as funny as Horatio—funnier perhaps. And Mozart, if you were unaccustomed to it, would sound as strange as Blackjohn. Amadeus Mozart—Amadeus Blackjohn, the composer. The latter was really more suggestive of orchestral undertakings. Amadeus Littlebeard—Wolfgang Littlebeard, the bandit . . .

He dreamed that he was on a foundering ship in a very heavy sea. He was sitting in a deck chair, clutching a life preserver in his arms, while the Commodore stood on the bridge shouting orders to the crew through a tin trumpet. The passengers were

getting into lifeboats which were rapidly lowered and cast off. But each time that he got up from his chair and started toward the rail, the Commodore would frown at him and shake his head in disapproval. This happened several times until at length all the boats were lowered and all the passengers had left the sinking ship. No one remained except himself and the Commodore who still stood on the bridge gazing sternly at the horizon.

He felt that the end was close at hand and, casting desperately about, observed a small raft on the forward deck which was already awash. Making sure that the Commodore was looking in the opposite direction, he rose quickly from his chair and crept stealthily toward the raft. It was not too soon. The raft floated free as the sea broke and washed across the deck. He was wading to his knees and the raft was drifting from him. In a moment it would be too late. He took a desperate stride and reached . . .

"Horatio Littlejohn!" Paralyzed, he stood there with his arm outstretched and slowly turned his head. "Yes, father—" The Commodore lowered the trumpet from his lips and frowned and shook his head. The raft floated across the sunken rail and bobbed away. The life preserver, which he still clutched in his arms, began to squirm and kick. The water had risen to his waist; the ship was settling fast. It lurched and rolled—and lurched again with sickening finality . . .

He was awake. The life preserver resolved to Franklin Delano who was very wet and kicking. The sensation of wading in the sea was now explained: the oilcloth had slipped out of place and his lap was dripping. It was clammy and uncomfortable but he felt relieved and glad. It was better than a sinking ship.

"I, er, believe that the baby needs attention," he remarked with studied carelessness. But Myra made no answer. He touched her arm but she did not turn her head. She was sitting in a stiff, unnatural posture, staring straight before her. He won-

dered, with a start of horror, if she could be asleep, and leaned to see her eyes. They were open, he discovered with relief, and looked strangely blank and sightless, and they seemed to be focused about a hundred yards ahead. The car lurched violently. He looked out of the window, and then he rubbed his eyes and stared with stupefaction. This was not Highway 66 nor any other highway. They were following a wagon track across the desert.

Lurch—bump—they dove into a gully, missed a boulder by a hair, and zoomed up the other side. The speedometer said sixty miles an hour. It was like a roller coaster on a washboard. Mirabel and Peter were awake and shrieked with glee as they bounced up and down against the roof.

"It's Uncle Ben," squealed Mirabel. "He always drives like that. But you mustn't wake her up. Daddy did one time and they had an awful wreck."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. He saw another gully coming and hung on tight and shut his eyes. Zoom—the trailer thundered at their heels and they were out of that. Zigzagging—twisting—skidding round the turns with the rocking, groaning trailer threatening every moment to fall on them and crush them like Juggernaut itself. They were going north, but—*where?* The wagon track was not a road at all, and there were countless other tracks diverging here and there. Still they sped on unerringly, spurning this path and choosing that without a breath of hesitation, careening to the right or left to follow half-obliterated wheel marks in the sand.

Someone knew where they were going and someone knew the way. He had lost his first alarm. The driver, though taking what appeared to human eyes to be very desperate chances, avoided disaster with comforting consistency. It was probably, he told himself, not dangerous in the least—not as dangerous as standing in a bath tub. Really hazardous affairs were arranged like traps and snares with all the dangerous elements concealed.

Zoom—another gully with water at the bottom. They roared across in a cloud of mud and spray. The wheels spun in the slippery gravel. Would they make it? Yes, they would; already they were staggering up the other side. But good heavens! Visibility was zero; the windshield was plastered and opaque. He glanced fearfully at Myra. There she sat as rigid as a ramrod, staring through an inch of mud. He breathed again and made a hasty mental note: "Phenomenon observed but source unknown." Franklin Delano began to howl. A gob of mud had hit him in the eye.

"Shh—shh—" admonished Mr. Littlejohn in a panic lest F. D.'s lamentations should recall the absent Myra with disastrous result. "Nice baby—don't you cry—" He jounced the infant up and down which seemed to make things worse, and he was almost in despair when he suddenly remembered he had heard or read that a person in a trance might be safely roused with music. He turned the radio switch and, a moment later, the hazards of the trip were all forgotten.

Black Beard in Arizona! He didn't get just where. The howling of the baby and the banging of the trailer made it difficult to hear. He administered a gentle shake to Franklin Delano and warned him rather sharply.

Black Beard had been found in Arizona! He had walked into a shop that very afternoon, and had tendered, in payment for his purchase, a twenty-dollar U. S. Treasury note which was *yellow* and not green. He had worn no disguise and had looked just like his pictures, black mustache and all, and had been as calm and collected as you please. The owner of the shop, whose name was J. D. Hamish—or something of that sort, had recognized him instantly, but, observing the ominous bulge of weapons in his pockets, had restrained his impulse to grapple with the bandit. He had changed the twenty-dollar bill without sign of his emotion, and, watching slyly through the window, had seen the outlaw cross the street and get into a car in which there seemed to be another person.

The car was a sedan. He could not tell what make because his view was from the rear. As to color it was green or brown or blue or black—a dark-colored sedan of fairly recent model. It had seemed to start immediately when Black Beard had got in which confirmed his impression that it had another occupant. A moment later it had dashed away at high and reckless speed, on Highway 66, toward California.

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. In his excitement he hugged Franklin Delano so tightly that the child had no further breath to yell and was very nearly smothered.

Hamish, notwithstanding the pressure of the moment, had exhibited great presence of mind which would no doubt entitle him to share in the rewards totaling fifty thousand dollars, all of which he had already claimed. He had, in short, taken the number of the car. "This dark-colored sedan of fairly recent model," intoned the news announcer, "bears a New York license plate of 1937; and the number—get this carefully please—the number is 327-429. I will repeat the number—3 2 7 — 4 2 9."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn again. And he would have been very much surprised if he could have seen the license plates on the dark-colored sedan of fairly recent model in which he was now bouncing up and down.

Black Beard was in a pocket, continued the announcer—the tightest pocket of his life. Highway 66 was bristling with armed men. Every egress had been blocked from Winslow west to Needles. Every intersection was already under guard. Capture was inevitable. Mr. Littlejohn sighed and shook his head. Still, he thought, they needn't be so sure of the thing; they had made mistakes before.

"Capture—or death," repeated the announcer, modeling his delivery on the March of Time. "Death by thirst or slow starvation in the uninhabited and barren desert or in lonely, rocky mountains where the cry of the coyote and the strident warning of the rattler hidden in the sage brush are the only sounds to break the dreadful silence."

Mr. Littlejohn could not repress a shudder. He glanced out of the window and was horrified to see that they were now climbing a mountain with an abyss at their feet. He could not see the bottom but only pointed peaks of black stalagmites which rose out of the chasm like some gigantic instrument of medieval torture. Dante had not pictured a more depressing sight.

A regiment of G men was already on the way, concluded the announcer. And J. Edgar Hoover was en route by plane to establish new headquarters at Flagstaff or at Winslow. Before embarking he had issued a brief statement to the press. "I have reason to believe that Black Beard is nearing the end of his long rope." And with a faint but meaning smile upon his lips, he had stepped into the plane which immediately took off.

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn once more. Well, there was many a slip . . . He smiled and nodded to himself.

The radio went on to something else, and the Young Men's Choral Society of Salt Lake City began to sing "Massa's in the Cold, Cold Ground." It did not seem appropriate and he was about to turn the dial when several things happened with breath-taking rapidity.

"Oh!—Oh!—Oh!" shrieked Myra, and she began to shake all over. "He's gone! He's gone!" She suddenly let go of everything and slumped down in the seat. "I don't know where I am and I can't see ——"

The caravan, relieved of guidance, hesitated for an agonizing moment and then began to back. Mr. Littlejohn decided all was lost; he closed his eyes and waited for the end. But the lumbering trailer saved them. It cramped and plunged into the bank with a resounding crash, twisting the rear end of the car till the right-hand wheel was hanging over nothing. The whole thing swayed and groaned but stayed there.

Myra rubbed her eyes and looked around. "Where am I?" she kept mumbling to herself. She said that Uncle Ben had

been running out ahead, but suddenly he vanished. She couldn't understand the thing at all.

"Oh, I remember now," she screamed. It seemed they had encountered Uncle Ben standing in the middle of the highway. He had motioned her to follow and had run along in front to show the way. Yes, that was exactly how it started. And he had been running on before them all the time until this very minute . . . Suddenly she straightened up and pointed to the radio. "Why, now I know! It's *that*."

"That?" repeated Mr. Littlejohn with an apprehensive start.

"Yes, yes, of course, *that piece*—'Massa's in the Cold, Cold Ground.' " Uncle Ben could not abide it and would not stay around when it was sung or even mentioned. He said it was a lie; he wasn't in the cold, cold ground nor was anybody else, and the whole thing was a fake. She turned off the radio. Uncle Ben was unquestionably upset and might not return for several days. Mr. Littlejohn said nothing; he felt guilty and depressed.

"But I ain't blaming you," she said, "and I think it's kind of fun." She leaned against his arm and looked into his eyes. "If we're lost, we're lost—together." And she got out of the car to see what could be done.

"Hum—" sighed Mr. Littlejohn as he wiped the perspiration from his forehead. If you didn't know the temperamental whims and fancies of the spirits, it was safer not to fool with them at all.

"Everything's just fine," shrieked Myra. The trailer had been dented but was otherwise intact, and the car still had three wheels on the ground. She changed Franklin Delano and scraped the windshield clean. They could not turn around and must therefore go ahead. Uncle Ben had meant them to go somewhere and would certainly resent it if they didn't keep right on. She started up the motor, and the caravan, after teetering on the brink for a hideous, endless moment, groaned and creaked and crawled ahead.

Mr. Littlejohn began to breathe again but not with ease or

comfort. The trip had lost its brilliant cosmic character. Progress was slow and painful as human progress is. He missed the dashing, careless certainty—the fine assurance of the unseen hand. Yes, he did miss Uncle Ben as he had missed few people in his life.

Myra kept on talking. She said that something funny had occurred that afternoon. While he was in the butcher shop, she had suddenly experienced a strange feeling of impending danger—a sort of inner shadow or darkening in the soul. The experience was not new. It commonly gave warning of the death of a loved one or a friend.

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. And he was debating with himself whether this matter could be properly recorded until the premonition was confirmed by the event, when the wheels skidded on the crumbling edge and an avalanche of boulders thundered down into the chasm. He hastily decided to record the item now and take a chance: "Phenomenon observed but source unknown."

"But it's all right now," laughed Myra, jerking back into the ruts. The shadow was all gone. It had vanished at the moment she had first seen Uncle Ben waiting for them on the highway. He had known they were in peril and had got them out of something.

And into something else, reflected Mr. Littlejohn. The clutch was slipping badly and steam was hissing from the radiator cap. And then abandoned them without a second thought because he didn't like a certain song—abandoned them in the middle of this incredible excursion . . . They crawled along a narrow ledge where a sober man would be afraid to walk, staggered up a final spur of slippery lava, and found themselves upon the top.

"Oh, look! Just look!" screeched Myra. "Peter! Mirabel!" She snatched Franklin Delano and held him up. "Ain't it the grandest thing you ever saw!"

It was very grand indeed. They were looking down into a

narrow oval basin from a rim of towering peaks which encircled it completely. The sun had cut half through the crenelated edge and the rocky walls beneath were dark with purple shadows. On the other side the ragged surface of the bowl was red and pink with tentacles of molten gold creeping toward the top. The floor of the valley was magenta with a thread of green cutting through the center, and on the very edge of this there seemed to be . . .

"It's a little town," screamed Myra. "Ain't it cute!"

Yes, it was a town—a very little town, and "cute" described it—a single street beside the thread of green, the steeple of a church. It looked like a picture in a book of fairy tales.

"I just can't wait to get there." And Myra started down.

The descent was something to remember. The wagon track which now resembled nothing but a goat trail, zigzagged down the mountain with hairpin turns at every hundred yards. The brakes no longer held and the trailer, thundering at their heels, kicked them on with blind, relentless fury. Avalanches roared down the slope and scattered into space behind them. It was impossible to stop and they rocked around the turns with the fenders digging in against the bank and the treadless tires screaming hot with protest. Something exploded like a bomb . . .

"It's a tire on the trailer," Myra said. "I ain't got a spare, but we can get another one in town."

Mr. Littlejohn thought of something else: he would order an Old-fashioned in that town—if by chance he ever got there—an Old-fashioned with a cherry in the bottom, and slices of pineapple and orange, and a tinkling cube of ice. He might even order two.

They jerked and lurched in sidling leaps with the motion of a drunken crab. One side of the thing was trying to outrun the other, and its bony structure moaned and rasped like arthritic joints in course of dislocation. Another explosion rent the air.

"Ain't we lucky!" Myra laughed. "That blowout's on the other side. Now everything is fine."

It was not fine but different. The trailer settled back with a defiant growl and slid upon its haunches. It gripped the hitching coupling with its teeth and tried to tear it from its socket. The smell of burning rubber filled the air. The radiator cap blew off and a cloud of rusty steam poured from the vent . . .

And then they coasted down a gentle slope and limped around the corner of a cliff into the town.

"Gee!" said Myra. "Well, that's over." And for once she seemed content to let it go at that.

Mr. Littlejohn felt a glow of admiration. Spirits or no spirits, she was certainly a person—a pioneer woman on the trek. He looked out through the deepening dusk. They were right in the middle of the town, a single street about a block in length. There was the church at the far end, and—yes, there was a bar—a sign which said "saloon," and another, and another. And here was a hotel. But nowhere did he see any sign of human life.

"I will make some inquiry," he said, and alighting from the car, he looked about with a vague sense of uneasiness. There was something queer about this town. The street, unpaved and filled with ruts, was edged with hitching rails for horses, and with crazy wooden sidewalks. The houses, of rough unpainted boards, leaned this way and that in picturesque abandon; and crudely lettered signs announced institutions and comestibles which awakened no memory from his past.

"Hum—" he murmured to himself, and he turned back to the car. "I—I believe that we have stumbled on a ghost town."

"A ghost town?" Myra stared.

"Yes," nodded Mr. Littlejohn who had read about the ghost towns of the West. "A mining town perhaps, abandoned years ago when the field of exploitation was exhausted."

"Oh—" said Myra. "But there must be *someone* in it." And she got out of the car with Mirabel and Peter close behind her.

"Yes, er, no doubt—" He squinted up and down the empty street.

"There must be folks in the hotel."

"Why, yes," Mr. Littlejohn agreed with a conviction which he did not feel. "Why, yes—there must." And, followed by the children, he crossed the rotten sidewalk, ascended to the porch whose wooden pillars tottered at his touch, pushed through the squeaking door, and found himself—outside. Yes, literally *outside*—not in a house or a hotel or anything at all, but out of doors beneath the twilight sky, facing a dainty screen of willow branches beyond which he could hear the gurgling music of a mountain stream.

"What is it?" shrilled Myra from the doorway.

"I—I don't know—" stammered Mr. Littlejohn, almost speechless with amazement.

"I do," piped Mirabel. "It's just a movie set."

And a movie set it was—a papier mâché village, a two-dimensional town, a façade and nothing more.

"Ain't it cute," screamed Myra, her enthusiasm mounting. "We'll back the trailer right in here against the door and pretend that we live in a hotel. I'll have everything all straight and supper cooked in no time." And she tore into things with a brisk and practiced hand. "I guess nobody'd ever look for anybody here," she shouted with an air of satisfaction. And Mr. Littlejohn guessed that she was right.

He could hear her chattering and directing with indefatigable energy as he strolled about the town with Pickles at his heels. It was compact and complete from the church at one end to the schoolhouse at the other. "Silas Graham, Lawyer" he read upon a window. "Nick Shine, Undertaker." The Wells Fargo Bank had a gold-leaf sign; John P. Groat was president. "Sam Trotter, Justice of the Peace"—"Billy's New York Barber Shop" —"Ah Foo, Chinese Laundry." A butcher and a grocer, and a man named Hawkins Pringle who dealt in real estate and who might be the villain of the play. Above his modest office there

appeared to be a hall reserved for "Vigilantes." T. B. Bullwing was a doctor and a surgeon above the butcher shop; and "Slywood, Painless Dentist" occupied the space next door. There was an "Assay Office," and just beyond the school was "Tom Snook's Livery Stable" which might serve as a garage.

The left side of the street was dedicated to more sinister undertakings. Except for the office of the sheriff, a stalwart, two-gun man named Ryder Westcott, and the Gold Nugget Café, every other building was a dance hall or saloon. "Paris Belles, Concert Night and Day"—"The Two Bit Roost"—"Mamie's Place"—"The Silver Dollar" and "The Legal Tender," and many more with signs setting forth Gargantuan goblets with mountain caps of foam, each one boldly labeled "The Biggest for a Nickel."

Pasted on the window of the "post office," which also served as "stage depot," was a large and lurid placard with the chromo of an ugly desperado who wore a black mustache. He was wanted for robbery and for murder, and one hundred dollars reward would be paid for information which led to his arrest. It was signed by Ryder Westcott. Well, Westcott would get him in the end, mused Mr. Littlejohn, after a thrilling chase. They would finally shoot it out in some horrifying spot and, when their guns were empty, would come to death grips on the brink . . . Hawkins Pringle was mixed up in it some way. He would probably turn up on a livery nag of Snook's, and then . . . But of course there was a girl, a pretty little thing, Ryder Westcott's sweetheart, to whom this rascal, Pringle, had made objectionable advances. He had her in his power through a forgery or a mortgage . . . Heigh-ho! It was all there—or somewhere on a strip of celluloid.

Yes, *it was all there*—everything there was in Paris, London, or New York, or anywhere—every aspect of the thing called human life and any combination of its follies. Supplies of fuel for the human engine; sickness and pain; avarice and greed, and all the many fears that they provoked; the source of litigation

and equipment for its process; the forces of the law and of extra-legal means—no doubt there was a gallows conveniently near by; a bank to hoard your gold and gambling games to tempt you; purchasable love, and whisky in which to drown its emptiness. There was vice, and there was virtue represented by the church; and the futile hope of coming generations represented by the school which somehow failed to teach anybody *how* to live. And finally at the end of the stupid, silly struggle, Nick Shine was waiting for you with a coffin . . .

He sighed and then he smiled. The coffin *wasn't real.* There was no money in *that bank.* Silas Graham had no clients; Bullwing had no patients; and the dentist pulled no teeth. There was no one following foggy superstitions in the church, nor solving useless problems in the school. The vigilantes hanged no men, nor were there any laws for the sheriff to enforce. Sex could not rear its ugly head behind *those walls,* and not one drop of whisky could be found in a saloon. No loves or hates or hopes or fears disturbed the peaceful solitude, for none of these people had ever lived at all. And what a lot of trouble they had saved themselves.

"The perfect town!" he said aloud. "The perfect town in which to live—in which to rear the young." He paused and looked about with a feeling of elation. All the gadgets of a going social state with none of the drawbacks which communal life involved. A community where every human folly might be safely indulged, and every human gesture expansively described without fear of compensatory heartache. A simple solution of the social problem: *tear down everything except the front.*

His fancy galloped on. The façades of institutions were the parts that really mattered, around which human habits had been formed. And the gutting of the buildings would scarcely be remarked if the ornamental fronts were kept intact. Thus life could go right on across the old habitual bridges while new

points of view were born and new habits slowly grew. In a decade or millennium almost anything could happen . . .

He pictured Wall Street with the back hewed out—a comforting arrangement for everyone concerned. And the Rosydent factories with the eager proletarians trooping in at eight o'clock—into nothing but an endless out-of-doors. And his home in 69th Street, the house in which he had been born and had died a thousand times—he could face it very easily if he knew it wasn't there. If you turned on the radio there would be no response; if you picked up the telephone no one would ever answer. Yes, a world constructed like a moving-picture set was a perfect place for habitation. You could cling to all your habits as tightly as you pleased but not one of them could hurt you or anybody else.

A lonely world perhaps. Still, in a world of make-believe you should be able to evoke make-believe companions. He smiled at the idea and paused before a tiny shop which bore the legend "Millinery," and, in the corner of the glass, the owner's name . . . It was growing dark and he came close to read it. Good heavens! His heart skipped several beats. "Mary Jones—" Yes, that was it—not Smith nor Brown, but *Jones*—the girl in New Haven, in the millinery shop, nearly forty years ago—his one romance from which he had been whisked away with a tutor on a freighter.

"Dear me—" he said. Memory flooded back: the evening he had come to say good-by. They had sat there in the shop long after dark, and he had held her hand. He would come back, he said, in just a little while. Not his father nor anything on earth could interfere with that. But he had not come back, and she had known he wouldn't. She hadn't said so nor anything he could remember; she had sat very still with her cheek pressed against his, and the hot tears . . . Heigh-ho! Sweet and bitter memory . . .

He pushed the door which yielded to his hand and creaked on rusty hinges. There was nothing there of course—nothing

but the out-of-doors. He stepped across the threshold and stumbled on a willow root. Still, in a world of make-believe . . .

He stood there, waiting in the dark. And then suddenly it happened: the shop, the hats of forty years ago, and Mary Jones, just as he remembered her—a pretty little thing with big brown eyes and wistful smile.

"Good evening, dear Horatio." It was the greeting of an old, old friend, but nothing more than that.

"Er, good evening, Mary." He did not take her in his arms, nor touch her lips, nor hold her hand. It was too late for that and they both knew it. He sat down by the counter where he had used to sit. "You—you haven't changed."

"Nor you, Horatio."

"Oh, yes!—I—well—" He spread his hands in deprecation.

"I mean—*inside*," she smiled.

"Oh!" He considered for a moment. "Well, perhaps I haven't, Mary."

They chatted like old friends, without constraint, but avoiding any reference to the past which might be embarrassing or painful. Mary talked about the town—a rough and ready place in contrast with New England. Still, she was happy here. There was something about it that was very big and fine, and there were some men of sterling worth. Dr. Bullwing she was sure he would like, and the lawyer, Silas Graham. The banker, J. P. Groat, was a more conventional type, but a substantial person in his way.

"And Hawkins Pringle?" Mr. Littlejohn inquired.

Mary shook her head. It turned out, as he had suspected, Pringle was a rascal and had made himself objectionable. But Ryder Westcott would take care of that, she said.

"Oh—Westcott?" He could not repress a start.

"Yes—" She blushed and dropped her eyes. "Ryder and I are going to be—married."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn and adroitly changed the sub-

ject. He spoke about his quest—the enigma of his life and of human life in general which he was determined to unravel.

Mary listened with attention, nodding her approval. "I feel sure, dear Horatio, you will find the answer here."

"You do? But why?"

"Because there is something in the expression of your eyes which makes me think that you are very close to it."

"Oh!—Oh, thank you, Mary—" Emotion choked him. He reached out to take her hand—to touch it . . .

"Come and get it!" It was Myra screaming from the porch of the hotel, half a block away.

The hand was gone—the hats, the shop—all vanished. He got up from the boulder on which he had been sitting and went out into the street.

"Come and get it!"

"Hum—" He walked cautiously along the creaky sidewalk. The stern voice of reality commanding him to dinner—a necessary aspect of this thing called human life. He could see the lighted candles on the table on the porch, and he caught a titillating whiff of hamburger. The world of make-believe was delightful to explore; it had aesthetic values which the other seemed to lack. But you couldn't count on it at dinnertime.

If you could combine the two, the unreal and the real, and still not get them mixed . . . Yes, that would be rather nice, and might possibly contribute to solution of the mystery. But you had to be careful to remember *which was which*. He nodded earnestly. Asylums were filled with the people who forgot.

X

THE DAYS WENT BY—WARM SUNNY DAYS and brilliant starlit nights.

Regularly in the morning, after breakfast, Mr. Littlejohn took the children off to school through whose depressing portal they emerged, with shouts of eager joy, upon a shallow pool where they played with paper boats or built houses out of pebbles until they were dismissed by the ringing of a bell at twelve o'clock.

The balance of the morning he devoted to visiting with friends of whom he soon had many. As a rule he would drop in at the bank, sometimes to cash a check but more often just to chat with John P. Groat. They would talk about the market and financial matters generally, and in time would get around to the New Deal which Groat could never sufficiently condemn. After this he might call on Silas Graham whom he found more reassuring than his ex-attorney, Hemlock, who had always hemmed and hawed about anything at all. Graham was a forthright fellow and a brilliant lawyer, and one case that came to trial in Sam Trotter's justice court—a complicated matter involving real estate in which Hawkins Pringle was defendant—was immediately decided in favor of his client. Hemlock would have lost it.

He spent many pleasant hours in the millinery shop visiting with Mary. He liked to sit among the hats and listen to her chat of local social matters. Their relationship was charming but not in the least sentimental or romantic. His feeling for the child was platonic or paternal; he wasn't sure which. In

any case he was fully aware of the claim of Ryder Westcott whom he liked as a friend and admired as a man, and in whose dingy office he heard blood-curdling tales of man hunts in the mountains.

Billy trimmed his hair in the New York Barber Shop, and he called on Ah Foo to get his laundry. As he strolled through the village, from Tom Snook's Livery Stable to Nick Shine, Undertaker, he was greeted everywhere, and it may as well be stated that he had some acquaintance with the left side of the street.

To be sure he avoided walking on it except when he ran across for a cocktail before dinner, and he confined these visits to an orderly and quiet place which was operated strictly as a bar without gambling games or women. The proprietor, whose name was Homer Stillwell, was a decent family man and a deacon in the church and would tolerate no hoodlums in his place. His clientele included the most substantial citizens, and John P. Groat and Graham were often to be found there. Mr. Littlejohn had looked in at the others and found them rough and noisy; and once—it had better be confessed—just once he had ventured out at night when he was supposed to be in bed, and had walked into the Paris Belles and stayed there until two A.M., but he never felt the urge to go again. It had been just like any other night club, crowded and uncomfortable; the food was bad, the liquor worse, and the prices simply scandalous.

Next day, not feeling very fit, he called on Dr. Bullwing whom he found to be a hearty, cheerful man not at all like his ex-physician, Schwartzkopf who was always making mountains out of molehills. Bullwing felt his pulse and took his blood pressure.

"Blackjohn—" he said with a convincing laugh, slapping his patient on the shoulder, "you are the youngest man of fifty-five that I have ever met. Why your arteries are no older than a

baby's. Smoke all you want and drink anything you like. I'll stake my reputation that you'll live to be a hundred."

Mr. Littlejohn paid the doctor's fee which was a fifth what Schwartzkopf would have charged, and walked out of the office feeling like a colt.

In the afternoons he took long walks with Pickles for companion. He carefully chose excursions involving difficult terrain, having found to his great joy that Myra's feet were tender. The bed of the stream was one of his favorite jaunts. The creek came rushing from a deep and narrow canyon whose boulder-strewn floor was lush and shady. It was something to explore. You had to wade across and creep along a ledge, again and again from side to side, until at last the way was blocked by a waterfall cascading from a rocky funnel thirty feet above your head. There was a ledge upon the other side from which, with a bit of sturdy climbing, you might have gained the top, but to reach it was impossible as the intervening pool, which received the cataract, was like a boiling cauldron.

Here he would seat himself upon a mossy stone which the elements had hollowed like an armchair, and taking out his mouth organ would painstakingly rehearse his small but varied repertoire to which he had added two or three selections picked up from Mirabel. And often, when he paused for breath, he would look up with longing toward the forbidden land whose hidden mysteries intrigued his spirit of adventure. If only he could get up there . . .

After supper, which was prompt at six o'clock, he frequently obliged with a program on his mouth organ while Myra did the dishes. But it must not be supposed that he did not lend a hand with the household operations. He gathered wood for the campfire which was lighted every evening in the middle of the street, and around which Mirabel would pirouette, improvising elfin dances or singing like an angel to herself while Peter squatted watching like an Indian. He also fetched the water from the stream, carried out the garbage, and often dried the

dishes. He was not a man to sit around and watch the women work.

When the children went to bed he would slip off to the car, which was parked in Tom Snook's Livery Stable, and sitting there alone he would listen to the news.

There was no word of Black Beard who had simply driven west on *Highway 66* and vanished from the earth. The steel jaws of the trap had snapped together at the proper moment, but the trap was empty. Black Beard was gone, and the vehicle in which he rode—a dark-colored sedan of fairly recent model with a New York license plate of 1937, bearing the number 327-429, and in which Mr. Littlejohn was sitting at this moment —had dissolved into the air. There were those who contended that the outlaw had burned it and then fled into the mountains to die of slow starvation; and one wild theory had been recently advanced that the car was not a car but was actually a plane or some combination of the two. Dorothy Parker, in Hollywood on a cinema assignment, had humorously remarked, referring to her own car of low-priced, well-known make, that if it was one of those, the whole mystery was cleared up: Black Beard had pried the lid off and was living on the contents. Mr. Littlejohn chuckled to himself. J. Edgar Hoover was still at Winslow, Arizona. He looked pretty glum, and replying to questions from the press, merely frowned and shook his head . . .

"Hum—" Mr. Littlejohn would smile with satisfaction; and then he would stroll back to the hotel where he usually found Myra sitting on the porch communing with the spirits. He would seat himself at a respectful distance and follow the proceedings with critical attention.

But miracles soon cease to be exciting, and he who would achieve a lasting fame from their performance would be wise not to do the same one twice. The trumpet rolled around and took the air, and various voices came and went; the Indian, Mike, was always there, and Brother was quite regular. He squeaked an unintelligible baby talk and did a lot of whining.

He wanted Mirabel's toy elephant and could think of nothing else. And the elephant would clatter up and down the porch to an accompaniment of childish gibberish. Mr. Littlejohn made startled note of this but, with frequent repetition, found the whole affair annoying. And then one evening something really happened; when the seance was concluded, the elephant could not be found—not anywhere.

"He's took it," Myra screamed. "He's de-materialized the thing."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn, and inscribed in the record: "Phenomenon observed but source unknown."

His bedroom was a patch of smooth white sand in the shadow of a willow by the creek. He had had quite a battle about that, and assumed at the time that he had won. But the battle had been merely a preliminary skirmish, and the war had gone right on in true guerrilla style with accumulating strategy on both sides.

"How do you like it this way?" Myra would inquire, fussing with her hair.

"Like it? Like what?"

"My hair, you silly. Don't you never look at me?"

"Oh, yes! It's very nice."

"Don't you think it's more becoming?"

"Hum—" No matter how she fixed it, it looked frowzy. "Yes, I believe it is."

"Oh, you! You don't never notice nothing." She would now stick her head close to his face. "I just washed it; don't it smell good?" He would sniff and try to smile; he had never liked the smell of laundry soap.

She dieted and insisted that he feel how loose her dress was. He said that he could see it with his eye, but she looked as plump as ever. She drank lemon juice which she had heard was good for the complexion, and she worked on her face for an hour every day, filling up the pores with some kind of greasy stuff and pulling the hairs out of her eyebrows. She

found a piece of lipstick and used it inexpertly in unexpected places. To cap the climax she made herself a pair of shorts and, garbed in them and a pink brassière, took sunbaths in the most conspicuous spots. Her feet were large, her thighs were fat, her ankles thick. Spread out in an abandoned attitude on a boulder by the creek she suggested a Bavarian Lorelei.

It almost spoiled his walks. "Yoo-hoo!" And there she was, smirking and beckoning with unmistakable intention. Once he nearly stepped on her. He had started to pick his way across and was balanced on a slippery stone at the moment that he saw her stretched out on a granite slab in the middle of the stream. "Yoo-hoo!" she screeched. Her eyes were fixed upon him with a warm and hopeful look. He slipped and fell into the creek. "Why don't you come and play with me?" But pretending that he had not heard, he waded out and fled. For the balance of the afternoon his knees were weak and trembly.

At supper she was rather short and cross. And it was that very evening that Uncle Ben turned up, and turned out to be a rough and jovial spirit with a boisterous sense of humor and a fund of salty anecdote. He had spent his life as a brakeman on a freight and felt that he had been about and seen the world as indeed no doubt he had. He had not walked out on them, he said, on account of "Massa's in the Cold, Cold Ground," but had left them as abruptly as he did because he suddenly remembered an appointment. He leered a little about this and Myra said that he was just a rascal which seemed to please him mightily. Anyway, he said, he knew they were almost at the top and would have to go ahead and were bound to wind up exactly where he wanted them.

"Yes, but why?" demanded Myra.

"Wouldn't you like to know?" chortled Uncle Ben.

"Yes, I would. What danger were we in?"

"Never tell a woman nothing." He laughed and related a very risqué story. Myra giggled coyly.

"But how long are we to stay here?" she persisted.

"Don't you wish you knew?"

"Yes, I do."

"Ain't you getting on all right?"

"Yes, but——"

"But what? Ain't you rid of that nincompoop that you been married to?"

"Uncle Ben! You hadn't ought to say such things."

"I talk right out in church. He always was a nincompoop. And now you're shut of him and you got a real he-man."

"Uncle Ben—" she giggled. Mr. Littlejohn was beginning to perspire.

"What've you got to kick about? What's on your mind?"

"Well—we ain't got no tires for the trailer, and where are we to get 'em?"

"How should I know?"

"But——"

"But, my eye!" snapped Uncle Ben. "You drive a body crazy. You're all alike, every dod-rotted human that I know—always asking questions—questions. I'm getting dawgone sick of it." Mr. Littlejohn nodded to himself reflecting that, on this score, the spirits might have sound cause for complaint.

"Please don't get sore, Uncle Ben." She began to cry. "I'm all upset tonight. I don't know what's the matter with me."

"Shucks, now you stop crying!" The dissolute old rascal could not withstand a woman's tears. "I know what ails you and I'll tell you what to do. He's shy, that's all."

"He? Who? I don't know what you mean." But Mr. Littlejohn knew and was shaking in his shoes. If the spirits were against him . . .

"Shucks! I never wasted time getting ready for a thing that only lasts a moment." He laughed uproariously. "There's just one way to handle that. Now you listen to me close—" His voice sank to a hoarse and unintelligible whisper.

Mr. Littlejohn slipped out of his chair without a sound and walked across the street to Homer Stillwell's bar. He felt that

he had to have a drink. Homer looked up with a smile from the glass that he was polishing and said that he would find some of his friends in the back room. Mr. Littlejohn strolled back there and found Graham, Groat, and Bullwing seated at a table discussing local politics. They were very glad to see him and invited him to join them.

"You look a little seedy." Graham eyed him narrowly. "Is anything the matter?"

"Matter? No, no—" Mr. Littlejohn laughed with a very hollow sound, but after he had had a Scotch and soda he suddenly decided to confide his dilemma to his friends. "Gentlemen," he said with well-bred hesitation, "I should like to ask your several opinions and advice on a question of some delicacy——"

"Humph! I thought there was something," Graham growled. The others nodded silently and, when Homer had retired after bringing a fresh round, leaned forward in their chairs prepared to listen carefully.

Mr. Littlejohn, having fortified himself with a copious draught of liquor, described the situation with admirable restraint, yet did not obscure the facts or mince his words. When he had concluded he looked first at John P. Groat whose opinion he felt from a long and wide acquaintance with financial men and bankers, would be the least important.

"Well—" said Groat, stroking his chin with a noncommittal air, "the trend of minor movements is impossible to forecast. How are we to tell, from glancing at the tape, if this particular affair is a technical adjustment or the possible beginning of a big bull operation?" He shook his head. "Frankly, in the absence of statistics and a graph, I do not feel, in view of my connections, that I can say more than that."

"I can," said Graham savagely. "The road to hell is lined with traps like this." And he went on to enumerate the many complications, biological and legal, which might possibly ensue. The woman was fecund; there was evidence of that. Also she

had a husband and the thing might be a plant with blackmail for objective. There was certainly a chance of getting into court on a statutory charge with contributory claims and resultant heavy damages. "But assuming," he concluded, "that this person has no ulterior motive and is solely instigated by the heat of her desire, have you carefully considered the nature and extent of the obligation which you must accept if you permit yourself to be seduced?"

"Why, no—" Mr. Littlejohn said doubtfully. "I really have not thought of it that way. It had occurred to me that, er, possibly—just *once*——"

"Once!" thundered Graham with a harsh and bitter laugh. "*Once!* Do not delude yourself with such an error which testifies to your generous, guileless nature but would forge a ball and chain around your future. Not once, but *daily*; that will be your lot, for the insatiable rapacity of the female is ignorant of surfeit and blind to the amenities of rational intercourse. Not daily, but *morning*, *noon*, and *night*; there is no end to it. God help you, my poor friend, if once you start to feed that ravening maw."

Mr. Littlejohn shuddered and reaching quickly for his glass, drained it at a gulp. But it was Bullwing, good old Bullwing, who finally hit the nail right on the head.

"Blackjohn," he said in his rough and hearty manner, "Blackjohn, do you *like* this gal?"

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Littlejohn, "but, er—not that way——"

"That's all I want to know," the doctor grinned. "Then don't you give an inch, not a single goddamn inch." And he gave Mr. Littlejohn a reassuring slap upon the shoulder. "You just stand pat and remember what I say: *if it isn't fun, what is it?*"

"Hum—" Mr. Littlejohn nodded to himself. There it was, the whole thing in a nutshell. The conversation veered to other matters and, after one more round of drinks, he thanked his friends and, bidding them good night, walked out into the

street. If it wasn't *fun*, what was it? Why, yes, of course . . . "I'll be damned if I do," he said aloud. He was a little tight.

A light still burned inside the trailer. He crept along the street and made a wide detour to reach his bed, and sat down heavily on it with his elbows on his knees and his chin cupped in his hands. What had they planned, that wily pair? Something, he felt sure—something for this very night. He must protect himself before it was too late. But *how*? Even if he tried to keep awake, could he repel attack? He recalled her brawny arms and thick gorilla legs, and felt that it was doubtful. If he could hide in some safe place . . . Yes, that would be the thing. He would simply move his bed and could laugh at all their schemes.

But it was not as simple as it sounded. He carefully edged around a cholla bush with balls of spines like needles, dragging the clumsy mattress inch by inch. It fought him every step and seemed to come to life and cling to things, and he wondered if it could be involved in the conspiracy. He dared not make a sound and spent at least an hour crawling on his hands and knees a hundred feet along the stream. Then he could not find a level spot and finally went to bed with a great hump in his back and his feet cocked up above his head. It was safe, he told himself with an exhausted sigh, but most uncomfortable.

How long he slept he did not know but he was suddenly awake and sitting upright. Some hidden warning of the watchful psyche had abruptly roused him. The sense of danger was overwhelming; he was listening, looking, with every nerve stretched tight. The moon had risen now. He heard the cracking of a twig; he saw, with tightening breath, a spectral figure gliding through the willows—in white, head tilted to the sky, one arm outstretched in a triumphant gesture. He hugged himself to still the chattering of his teeth. If she was walking in her sleep, the clairvoyant eye would find him. But if she was awake . . . He waited, cold with terror.

Now she was coming toward him. Her feet were bare; he

could see the toenails glisten. Her nightgown caught upon a bush and lifted to her knees, and went on higher—higher—"I'll be damned if I do." He closed his eyes and waited endless moments in the dark. At length he dared to peek. *She had gone by*—had passed the cowering pheasant in its covert. Her broad behind was waddling through the moonlight like a duck.

Now she was close beside the spot where, but for the grace of God . . . He shuddered. She sank upon her knees and seemed to grope upon the ground—feeling for something. Then she straightened up and, above the murmur of the stream, he heard her say in amazed and injured accent, "Don't that beat hell—" She backed away, full broadside on, into the cactus burs upon the cholla bush; and then she yelled and ran.

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. That old devil sex was a very funny thing. It was always turning up when you had no appetite and was difficult to find when you were hungry; and, like the hors d'oeuvres on a cocktail tray, it was always the morsel the other fellow took that seemed to be the only one you wanted. Something rustled in the leaves and he thought of rattlesnakes. It made enemies of people who should be the best of friends, and in turn made friends of natural enemies. It made idiots out of wise men, and wise men out of fools. As with lightning, which it very much resembled, you could not predict where it would strike or just what it would do except that there was likely to be damage.

He heard the dismal cry of a coyote and snuggled closer in his blankets. Still, it might be only calling to its mate. The beasts of the field seemed to manage pretty well. They did not view the problem as a major indoor sport. He sighed and looked up at the stars. There they were—packed in the sky like silver pins upon a purple cushion. He watched them with his eyelids growing heavy. It was good to be alone beneath the stars. Still, *if* it had been someone else—someone like Mary Jones or Hildegarde . . .

Breakfast was not a cheerful meal. Myra did not sit down

at all; she said she had sciatica. She shook Franklin Delano for being wet, slapped Peter because he spilled the jam, stepped on Pickle's tail, and spoke sharply to Mirat l. They were all glad to get away.

Mr. Littlejohn, having left the children at the school, stopped by the post office and learned with satisfaction that there was nothing for him; then, after chatting for a while with Ryder Westcott whom he met upon the street, he dropped in at Bullwing's office. The doctor was seated in his chair with his feet cocked on the desk, engaged in a discussion with Silas Graham who was pacing up and down the floor. Mr. Littlejohn apologized for his intrusion and said he would return a little later, but they would not hear to his departure and insisted that he join them and arbitrate the matter in dispute.

Bullwing contended, quoting Schopenhauer, that pain was the most vicious enemy of man, and that freedom from it was the nearest to a state of bliss to which human beings could attain. "Take pain out of the world," he said, "and you rob it of its most engrossing terror."

Graham disagreed; he maintained that pain, while demoralizing in effect, was sufficiently uncommon as a factor, to profoundly influence the course of human life. "But poverty," he said, "which constantly afflicts four-fifths of the entire human race, is the actual deadly menace."

"There is no poetry in pain," smiled Bullwing.

"No?" snorted Graham. "Nor is there in poverty, my friend. Come, come, your professional point of view is a distortion. Because you are a doctor and are constantly in contact with suffering human creatures and the ravages of physical disorders, you believe that the world is made of pain."

"And because you are a lawyer," answered Bullwing, "and are constantly engaged with the economic problems of your clients, you believe that human life has no other major aspect. You have only one eye and that is blind."

Graham ignored this sarcasm; he was in deadly earnest: "I

have felt the teeth of poverty," he said, "and I know whereof I speak. Most human tragedies have compensatory values—broadening of the min or spiritual awakening. But poverty is not only bitter in experience but degrading in effect; no intellectual quickening nor emotional exaltation follow in its wake. It is an ugly, stifling, brutal thing."

Said Bullwing quietly, "Have you ever seen a human being dying of a cancer?"

"No," snapped Graham. "But the answer to that argument is apparent in its premise. You said, 'a human being *dying*.' And there *is* nobility in death and understanding too, if there be anywhere at all. '*Dying*,' you said: a brief, conclusive agony but for the misapplied technique of you scientific meddlers—a moment in an individual life. But poverty goes on and on and on—has its inception in the womb and its respite in the grave. No, I tell you. No! The seed thus born lies fallow in the soil, or taking root, is stunted in its growth. The fruit is sour, rotten at the core; the wood decays. There is nothing in the shell but *insufficiency of life*—that fatal curse of poverty."

"Graham," said Bullwing, "you had better have a drink." And he took a whisky bottle from the drawer.

"No water," cautioned Graham. He gulped the whisky straight and then went on. "Look, Bullwing! Here we are, we three—men in middle age, in decent economic circumstances, faced with inevitable death within a narrow span of time, and probably with suffering which may be mercifully brief or long and torturing. Well, here we are, we three. *And of what are we afraid?*—of pain?—of death? *No!* And you cannot look me in the eye and deny the truth of what I say. *We are afraid of poverty*."

"Speak for yourself," the doctor said, and he winked at Mr. Littlejohn as he handed him his glass.

"I am speaking for the whole damned human race." Graham flung himself down in a chair and mopped his dripping forehead.

"Well, Blackjohn," Bullwing grinned, "what do you say about it?"

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn and thoughtfully sipped his drink before replying. He might of course be wrong, he ventured modestly, but it seemed to him that the concluding argument had departed from the thesis—was in fact not concerned with poverty or pain, but with something else called *fear*—perhaps, he thought, the greatest scourge of all, but which had its own peculiar genesis and moved upon an independent course.

"Score one for me," said Bullwing, and Graham sat up straighter in his chair.

As to poverty, Mr. Littlejohn went on, it was a difficult subject for him to discuss since he had had no direct experience of the thing and had never felt the dire pinch of economic want. Graham shrugged and laughed. "Yes," smiled Mr. Littlejohn, "I know. You may speak to a person in bereavement on the subject of death though you have not died yourself or indeed sustained a loss, but for a man who *has*, to secure the attention of another who *has not*, or the defender of the *have not* dialectic, is an almost superhuman undertaking. Whatever he may say is already brushed aside before he starts." He paused and sipped again.

"Go on," said Bullwing, and Graham closed his eyes.

In the first place, continued Mr. Littlejohn, poverty required definition since, as a concept, it was purely relative, and what was poverty to one man was abundance to another. Still, he thought, a satisfactory definition could be formulated: if a man was cold and hungry, without place to lay his head, then he was poor.

"Good God!" exploded Graham.

"Shut up and listen," Bullwing said, and he winked at Mr. Littlejohn again.

"If we accept this definition," Mr. Littlejohn went on, "and mind you, I am speaking in a strictly economic sense—the victims of poverty, whom you have claimed to represent

four-fifths of the total population, will be greatly reduced—if not to a negligible number, at least to a fraction of the total you suggest."

"Ridiculous—preposterous—" Graham fumed.

"Yet it is true," Mr. Littlejohn said calmly, "for if a man is fed though it be not with caviar, and if he is clothed though it be not by a fashionable tailor, and if he has a place to lay his head though it lack the most commonplace appliances—still, he is not poor in an economic sense but only in relation to a competitive society."

"Sophistry!" shouted Graham. "And what of ragged children playing in the gutters?"

"What of them indeed?" smiled Mr. Littlejohn. "And what is a gutter, more or less, than an urban ditch beside a shady road?"

Graham tore his hair.

"No, no, friend Graham. Let us confine ourselves to facts which are, in themselves, sufficiently distressing. Food and raiment and a place to lay your head are economic verities which must be wrested from the world to provide for survival of the physical machine. And there are some who fail and their plight is sad indeed, but they are not so numerous as you think."

"What about the underprivileged hordes who toil away their lives for bare subsistence?"

"I should be more impressed with that appeal," Mr. Littlejohn replied, "if I could see among the leisure class some evidence of benefit from leisure."

"Score two," the doctor chuckled.

"Neither poverty nor wealth," Mr. Littlejohn went on, "nor leisure nor the lack of it, will purchase what men need which is truly without price—since it is *free to all.*"

"*Free?*" Graham leaped out of his chair.

"Yes, free: the sun, the moon, the stars, the trees, the flowers

in the field, the sea—companionship and solitude—beauty, romance, love."

"And the poor only *think* that they are poor?" sneered Graham.

"Yes, they think that they are poor in a sense that they are not, *but*, in common with the rich, they are very poor indeed."

"*What?*"

"Yes," nodded Mr. Littlejohn, "poverty is as common as you think, not the exception but the rule, but it is not, as you suppose, an economic thing. *Real poverty is poverty of soul.*"

"Bravo!" cried Bullwing, but Graham only stared.

"What men call poverty," Mr. Littlejohn resumed, "is really so many other things: pride, envy, jealousy, and discontent—and the common error that another field is greener than one's own—and the vast illusion of escape, that by accumulating gadgetry, one can forget the emptiness of life in the soothing anesthesia of possession. Another button on my coat, a water closet in the house, a radio, a car, a yacht, a this or that—and I shall be a man."

"Now wait a minute," Graham interposed. "Just what the devil do you mean by *poverty of soul*?"

"I mean—" Mr. Littlejohn rolled the final drops in the bottom of his glass and picked his words with care. "I mean—unawareness of the miracle of life—its wonders and its beauty—its purpose and its function; failure to understand it and to estimate its values. Yes, that is what I mean by poverty of soul."

"And I suppose you know the answers?" Graham jeered.

"No—" Mr. Littlejohn said cautiously, "but I think I'm on the track."

"Hold on now," interrupted Bullwing. "Let's stick to our knitting. We've finished up with poverty and the barrister

is on his back. Let's take a look at *pain* which at least is on the level."

"Well—" smiled Mr. Littlejohn, "I suppose I can speak of pain like anybody else——"

"Have you ever had a baby?" Bullwing grinned.

"Go on," said Graham sternly.

There was not much to say, Mr. Littlejohn admitted. Pain was pain, and distinctly unpleasant when you had it, and mankind seemed to have an inexhaustible supply. There were numerous explanations, among which the peculiar human urge to force the hand of nature by making it conform to human whims—of swimming up the stream instead of down—seemed perhaps most likely. But the origin of pain was no part of the discussion. He drained his glass and added after brief deliberation that at all events pain should be endured with equanimity since at worst it could only last a moment.

"A moment?" Bullwing stared.

"Why, yes," said Mr. Littlejohn, "a moment—*the* moment if you like, for there is only one in life, one moment that is present. And the balance of the pain is your memory of phenomena which no longer have existence, plus expectancy of others which are as yet unborn."

"Humph!" grumbled Bullwing. "Metaphysics!"

"And if it is—does that condemn it?"

"Well—" the doctor frowned and pulled his lip, "as a scientific man I'm obliged to answer yes."

"Rubbish!" shouted Graham. "You scientific men are a pack of slippery weasels. Metaphysics is your name for anything which does not issue ex cathedra from the temple of your creed, but I defy you to draw an honest line dividing metaphysics from your own peculiar logic. You are narrow-minded bigots and the moment you smell powder you raise the cry of heresy and run to hide behind your cloth just like all the other priests."

The doctor laughed. "Let's call the thing a draw. And now

that we've disposed of two great human scourges, I suggest that it is time to have a drink."

Mr. Littlejohn excused himself. It was time for lunch, he said, and in view of the delicate situation existing in his household, he had better not be late. They both went with him to the door and shook his hand. Bullwing slapped him on the shoulder and declared he was a real philosopher.

"I'm afraid not," Mr. Littlejohn modestly disclaimed, "for although, in the course of my years, I have read many books on philosophic matters, I have only very recently commenced to think."

"If you've commenced at all," smiled Graham, "you've got a long head start on most of your competitors." And he called down the stairs, "See you tomorrow, eh?"

"Tomorrow—" echoed Mr. Littlejohn, and hurried home in happy ignorance of the fact that he had seen these two good friends for the last time.

XI

IT WAS AFTER LUNCH. MR. LITTLEJOHN was sitting on the porch polishing some phrases of the "Rhapsody in Blue" which were still a little rough, when, happening to glance up, he saw to his amazement, in the middle of the street directly in front of the hotel, a long, low, rakish, pea-green touring car with the top rolled back and a uniformed chauffeur behind the wheel. There were two men in the back, one of them much older than the other, and both of them in slacks and fancy sweaters. The younger man was staring hard at him with a surprised and baleful air.

"What are you doing there?" he said.

"I live here," Mr. Littlejohn replied.

"Live where?"

"In there." And he pointed to the door.

"No, you do not live *in there*," the young man said with increasing irritation. "You do not live in there because there is not any *in there* there."

"It is plain now to be seen," the older man remarked as if he were talking to himself, "why this goddam set cost eighty thousand dollars."

"*Fifty* thousand," the young man corrected sulkily.

"*Eighty* thousand—with the *overhead*."

"Well, anyway, the guy is nuts," the young man whispered audibly. "I assure you, Mr. Kincaid, there is nothing there at all except the front."

Kincaid? Mr. Littlejohn was startled. Could it be Darius Kincaid, the producer-director of colossal super-spectacles?

"I am Darius Kincaid," said the man as he got out of the car. Mr. Littlejohn looked at him with interest. He was tall and bald with a conspicuous nose and a receding chin, and looked like a benevolent vulture which indeed, omitting the adjective, he was. "And this is Marcel Leon, my art director."

Mr. Littlejohn rose to acknowledge the introduction, and then asked anxiously, "You—you're not going to tear it down?"

"No." His eye roved up and down the street. "It would cost as much to tear it down as it did to set it up, but I had a curiosity to see for myself just where my *eighty* thousand dollars went."

"*Fifty* thousand," Marcel muttered.

"*Eighty* thousand—with the *overhead*." He kicked the steps which led up to the porch.

"They're very solid," Mr. Littlejohn assured him.

"So I see," said Kincaid dryly with a withering glance at his assistant. "*Oak?*"

"Oregon pine—condemned," replied the art director.

"There is one thing that has bothered me—" Mr. Littlejohn began. He was still standing on the porch.

"Only one thing?" Kincaid laughed. "You're a very lucky man."

"I should like to know—" Mr. Littlejohn ignored the pleasantry. "I have been anxious to find out the name of this town in which I live."

"Oh, the name of this town," repeated Kincaid with his eyes upon Marcel and a very nasty look in them. "The name of this town, my friend—this town in which you live—is Usgob."

"Usgob—" Mr. Littlejohn was conscious of a pang of disappointment. "It—it's a strange name for a mining town."

"Isn't it?" Kincaid agreed. Marcel was kicking rocks around the street. "Isn't it indeed, my friend? But you see, it is *not* a mining town."

"No—" Mr. Littlejohn said vaguely.

"No, not at all, my friend—not in the least. It is a Persian village."

"Oh—"

"A Persian village on the camel route to Baghdad."

"But—" Mr. Littlejohn protested, "there must be some mistake."

"You would think so, would you not?" The great director smiled like a hyena. "Well, you are right, my friend—a mistake, a trifling error, one of those minor misunderstandings which so frequently occur in the motion-picture business. Are you listening, Marcel?"

"I hear you," said the art director sulkily, "but a *mining* town was what I understood."

"A town in Asia *Minor*," snarled his chief.

"Well, it sounds like mining town." Marcel sat down upon the running board. "Anyway we've been all over that."

"Yes, we've been all over that." He leaned against a pillar of the porch and it fell into the street. "And that's all it means to you—eighty thousand dollars of my money."

"You have not made a picture here?" ventured Mr. Littlejohn.

"No, sir, I have not."

"And you don't intend to do so?"

"No, sir."

"But——"

Kincaid spoke between his teeth. "I am shooting a script which concerns a Persian shepherd and the Caliph's virgin daughter."

"But—surely——"

"Yes, my friend? You were about to say?"

"Well, I—I mean—" stammered Mr. Littlejohn, "there are so many stories here—right in this little town. For example, Mary Jones who has the millinery shop, and the sheriff, Ryder Westcott. I know, you see, because although I have not been here very long, still I am quite well acquainted——"

"Ah—" The great director looked bewildered. Marcel rose from the running board and the chauffeur turned his head.

But Mr. Littlejohn plunged on. "If you could meet my friends—John P. Groat, the banker, or Bullwing, or Graham, or half a dozen others—they could tell you so many interesting things. Why, there's everything right here that a man could find in Persia."

"Quite so—quite so," soothed Kincaid and moved back from the porch.

"I told you he was nuts," said the art director cheerfully in a very loud aside.

"On the contrary—" protested Mr. Littlejohn indignantly, and then he stopped. This would never do at all. He was getting things mixed up—the world of make-believe and the world of stern reality. He must be very careful . . . He drew himself up with dignity and said with fine restraint, "Sir, I regret that I cannot introduce you to my friends as they are, at the moment—out of town."

And now the door flew open and Mirabel, in her faded gingham dress, with her angel face in the halo of her curls, came dancing out and down the steps upon her elfin toes. She had a rag doll in her arms and was singing to herself in her sweet and wistful voice.

"Good God!" said Kincaid. She stopped and dropped a curtsy. "Where are you going, my pretty maid?"

"I am going a-Maying, sir," she sang and danced off down the street.

"Good God!" he said again.

"Curtains for Temple," grinned the art director.

"Marcel, you took the words out of my mouth." And he turned to Mr. Littlejohn. His eyes were gleaming like a falcon's. "Is that your child?"

"Why—er—not exactly—" Mr. Littlejohn said doubtfully.

"Not exactly," snapped the master of colossal super-spectacles. "What the devil do you mean by *not exactly*?"

"Well—" Mr. Littlejohn began. But at this moment Myra came through the door. She was in her sunbath costume and the art director turned away his face.

"Madam, good afternoon." Kincaid pointed down the street. "Is that your child?"

"And if it is, what of it?" Myra parried tartly.

"Ah!" He assumed his most urbane expression. "I should have had the eyes to see the unmistakable resemblance. Marcel, observe the contour of the mother's face and figure. How like the child she is—and how like her the child will be in the full bloom of maturity."

"Remarkable," said Marcel with a shudder. Myra was gaping like a defeathered goose.

"My art director, madam, and a connoisseur of beauty."

"Oh—" said Myra. She had taken in the chauffeur and the car.

"If I might have a moment of your time in private conversation——"

"Well—" She added hastily, "But I ain't going to buy nothing."

"Buy, madam? Buy?" The great man laughed like trickling oil and spread his yellow gloves to suggest that he had nothing in his sleeves—a gesture which had fooled some very clever people. "I have nothing to sell except my humble service to the public. Permit me, madam, to introduce myself—Darius Kincaid of Kincaid Productions. It is barely possible that you have heard my name."

"Oh, yes—" gasped Myra, clinging to the table for support.

"Thank you so much." He bowed. "And now, if you permit, I should like to discuss with you the terms of a motion-picture contract for your daughter."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn and strolled away unnoticed with Pickles at his heels.

He took his favorite path along the stream but his mind was in a whirl. Usgob! He sniffed disdainfully. What would

Graham say?—or Bullwing?—when they learned that their town had a silly name like that, and was not where they supposed it was at all. He could see their expressions when he told them. "A rose by any name—" the doctor might suggest with a twinkle in his eye, but Graham would be furiously angry. "Usgob or no Usgob, here we are and here we stay, and I defy any cinematic mogul or long-eared art director to evict me from my home or otherwise impinge upon my constitutional rights." Yes, Graham would be firm about the thing.

The name might be changed by some legislative process—a petition and a trip to Washington. He debated the question of a name, and then suddenly it came out of the sky: Blackbeard. Blackbeard, Arizona, the perfect name of course, and a fitting testimonial—monument perhaps—to the boldest, bravest outlaw of them all. He rolled the pleasant sounds upon his tongue. Humphrey Blackjohn of Blackbeard, Arizona. Yes, that would be the name. He felt certain that Graham and Bullwing would support him, and the rest of the town would fall in line. They might have some trouble with the post office authorities. There was Farley to be reckoned with—a pretty dangerous man. But he heard Graham's reassuring roar, "By God, sir, we'll take the case of Blackbeard, Arizona, before the Supreme Court." He smiled. Graham would do it too.

He emerged upon the waterfall and was reaching for his mouth organ when he noticed with amazement that the arc of the cataract had changed. Some freshet in the mountains had expanded the normal flow of water, and the fall, instead of hugging tight against the cliff, now spouted out like soda from a syphon. He crept closer to examine the phenomenon and was overjoyed to find a narrow open space behind the wall of water—and yes, there was a ledge which extended clear across, by which the raging torrent could be bridged.

Without a moment's hesitation, taking Pickles underneath his arm, he set out upon this hazardous adventure where one

slip meant certain death. But he kept his eyes upon his goal and did not even glance into the boiling cauldron underneath. There was fine determination in his bearing, and the thunder of the cataract was like music to his ear. He thought of Livingston trekking through the Congo—and Alice stepping through the looking glass. He, Horatio Littlejohn, was about to invade a virginal world.

He gained the other side and climbed from ledge to ledge, pushing the quaking Pickles up before him. It was no trifling matter; the rocks were wet and slippery and some of them were loose. A time or two he thought it was the end. But at length he scaled the wall and stood beside the nozzle of the chute. He was in a narrow chasm whose sheer black walls came almost together a thousand feet above his head. It was dark and it was cold; not a shrub or blade of grass relieved the sullen harshness of the stone. And the merry, laughing creek was a cold, black, silent stream running like a mill race and twisting in its channel like a serpent. Pickles crouched and whined.

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. The virginal world was a pretty dreary place. Nevertheless he determined to go on and, with a word of encouragement to Pickles who barked very feebly in reply, he boldly went ahead. There was just room to crawl along the edge, squirming over boulders shoulder high. Once Pickles slipped and, with a dismal howl, vanished in the flood. Mr. Littlejohn plunged in up to his waist and seized the dog just in the nick of time, but the current almost tore him from his feet. Some distance on there seemed to be a bend and a vagrant spot of sunlight. He struggled toward it hopefully, climbing, crawling on his hands and knees, speaking words of cheer to his four-footed companion, whose spirit of adventure had been quenched.

"Just a little farther," he would say. "Steady now, old man, don't lose your nerve. Who knows what we shall find? All roads are rough if they lead anywhere. I must remember that.

Courage, my friend." He dragged Pickles by the neck over a boulder. "There you are—saved but throttled in the process. I must remember that." It was something to discuss with Graham and with Bullwing: the hazards of entrusting your salvation to someone besides yourself. You saved an arm and lost a leg; or saved an eye and lost your head. "Courage, my friend." He crept around a smooth, bare face of rock with the icy water nipping at his toes. "Why—what—" he gasped and stared.

And well he might. The tortured canyon opened like a fan into a vast arena whose burnished walls rose straight up to the sky. The sandy floor, as naked as your hand, sloped gently to the cliffs, affording visibility to every spectator. And in the lowest spot, the very center of the mammoth bowl, a black, serrated lava cone broke through the surface like a rostrum. He was standing in the crater of an extinct volcano—extinct through geologic ages. The stream? He looked in vain; it had disappeared beneath the floor. But against the farther wall its subterranean course was plainly marked by a damp shadow on the sand.

But this miracle of nature was not the only marvel. Carved in the sandstone wall, a hundred feet above the hidden creek and jutting out across it—for in some distant age the stream had deeply undercut the bank—was a prehistoric city—a place for human habitation, designed with modern architectural nicety, square cut, utilitarian in its scheme, washed soft of line with age-old wind and water, and softly colored with the brush of time.

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn, and stood with folded arms and loudly beating heart. What had Napoleon said in the shadow of the Pyramids? "Army of Italy, three thousand years of history—" Or was it four? "—are looking down on you." Yes, four at least, or five, or six or seven . . . No scaling ladders ever reached so high. The floor had raised and sunk, and raised and sunk—how many times? Something caught his

eye and he ran closer. The dry sand squeaked beneath his feet, but at the shadow's edge Pickles hung back and barked a frantic warning . . .

"Courage, my friend—" But as he spoke, the saturated sand dissolved beneath his feet. In a twinkling he had gone in to his knees. Remembering something he had read, he threw himself upon his face and, squirming on his belly, escaped out of the trap, but only *just*. He crawled and rolled to safety, and when he was once more upon the firm, dry sand he looked at Pickles with a new respect. The instinct of the dog had been correct. Instinct or clairvoyant eye? It never helped much, giving names to things.

And now he looked for the thing that he had run to see. Yes, there it was—an earthen pot upon a window ledge—a hundred feet above the ground. Some human hand had put it there a thousand years ago—or five—or ten—and meant to pick it up a moment later. Why had it failed? What happened in that little interval? The yellow corn set out for supper, and then—disaster—alarm, assault of enemies or elements, death of a child, forgetfulness in amorous adventure—or what? The hand was gone; its purpose unfulfilled; and all the hands that had worked and played and loved and sorrowed here, as recordless as if they had not been at all, but—the earthen pot remained. Heigh-ho! What more was there in all the carved and written history of the world than in an earthen pot?

"Pickles," he said firmly, "we live in order that the soul may have an opportunity to learn and grow, but not for sentimental contemplation of another's pots or shards. No, my friend, such time is squandered; experience, to have value, must always be—*your own.*"

And he turned his back upon the crumbling ruin, walked with a deliberate air to the center of the bowl and ascended by convenient steps to the platform of the rostrum. Nodding

politely to the chairman, he looked out upon a sea of upturned faces.

It was an inspiring sight—the largest convention ever held. Every race, every color, every creed were represented; there were delegates from every society on earth. They stood waiting in silent groups about their banners which undulated in the breeze like a field of ripening grain.

One thing Mr. Littlejohn immediately remarked: of the several hundred banners which were close enough to read, every slogan began with "Down" or "Anti." Anti-war—semitic—New Deal—Catholic—Protestant. Down with armaments—with Roosevelt—Eden—Chamberlain—Hitler—Stalin—with the police—with Grade A milk—with the niggers—with the Irish. Anti-liquor—tobacco—food—and drugs. A group of long-haired mystics were squatting by a banner "Down with science and the church"; and across the way the scientific delegation was desperately engaged in trying to keep its slogans up to date. They kept taking down their flag and scratching something out or putting something in until the whole banner was illegible. One group alone seemed to have no banner and Mr. Littlejohn inquired who they were.

"The Jews," the chairman whispered in reply.

"But surely they——"

"Oh, yes," the chairman smiled. "But you see they can't make up their minds. They're afraid it may interfere with business."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn, and without more ado he removed his cap and advanced with calm assurance to a row of glittering microphones which had been ingeniously devised to translate his address into twenty-seven languages including Gaelic and Esthonian. There was expectant silence; even the scientists were still.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Mr. Littlejohn began, then paused and added simply in a tone of winning gentleness, "My friends—" You could have heard a pin drop in the great arena

whose acoustics had been fashioned by a master hand. "We are gathered here from every quarter of the globe, representing every human status and every human point of view. We are convened in earnest solemn conclave to determine, if we can, what to do to save this world in which we live—its institutions and its so-called civilization—from the chaos of destruction which seems ready to engulf it." A pause; the very banners seemed to hang breathless in the air. "My friends —I shall be brief and to the point: *the world cannot be saved.*" A shuddering gasp of horror burst from the silent bowl.

"No, the world cannot be saved," repeated Mr. Littlejohn, "*but—the individual can.*" He smiled at the bewilderment his words evoked. "I mean just what I say. Salvation is not a collective but an individual matter. The world of which you speak, whose salvation you beseech, is merely a convention to which you have subscribed, but it has no reality. Reality exists in the *individual soul* which can and must be saved—that drop of conscious life, detached for an instant from its timeless, spaceless sea, scattered from a wave crest, crystallized in flight before it falls again into the living ocean whence it came. That drop is *you, yourself*—the product of your individual flight—and *must be you forever.* The world is not a world, nor society society; these are but names, conventions, illusions of the senses. There is no such thing as sand, but there are *grains* of sand, and *each grain is a grain.*" He paused. Save for what seemed to be a minor altercation in the scientific section, not a ripple stirred.

"*There is no death.*" These words he uttered with profound conviction. Moments ticked by on the clock and then a mighty roar of joy burst from the audience, and you could hear them saying, one to another: "There is no death"—"No death"—"You heard him say there is no death." It was like the buzzing in ten thousand hives. "*No death,*" repeated Mr. Littlejohn. "I mean exactly what I say. And life cannot be understood

in any other terms, and *must be understood to be intelligently lived.*

"Life, as we call this brief excursion, *has* a purpose; and its purpose is development and growth of the individual soul through all mundane experience that contributes to that end. *So live that your soul shall learn and grow*—and mark, I said your *soul*, that essence, grain of living truth which is yourself and which you rarely know, whose still, small voice you seldom hear. Live not in the past whose lessons, learned, are sponged forever from the slate. The value of a memory is what you have *acquired* from the fact and nothing more. Live not in the future which is *not to live* at all. Live only in the *one eternal moment which is now.* But see to it that you *live*—completely and *awarely*; yes, constantly aware of the *miracle of life.* Fear no punishment and hope for no reward beyond the stunting or expansion of your soul. This is the gateway to salvation and there is no other."

He paused again and there was suitable applause, but some of the religious groups began to move uneasily and a number of banners were seen moving toward the exits.

A woman stepped out of the pacifist section, which was close beside the rostrum, and held up her hand. "Sir," she said in a clear, strong voice, "how can we live according to your precept when war stalks through the world, butchering little children in the streets?"

"Madam pacifist," Mr. Littlejohn replied, "the world you speak of is a phantom whose existence I deny, and the fact that you refer to and regard it as a thing outside yourself, sustains my point of view. But let that be. The seeds of war, whose ignorant, wasteful violence you deplore, are in *you.*" She drew back with a startled cry. "Yes, in you, madam." He pointed with his finger. "And in you and you and you. The seeds of war are *greed and fear*, and they are in you all. Look not at the sky; phenomena do not manifest *in vacuo.*"

A man's voice: "What about security?" The question was

popular and thousands of voices echoed the refrain: "What about security?"

"Security," the speaker answered firmly, "is an illusion of a phantom world, and in illusion there can be no security. In the sense in which you ask the question there is no such thing." The audience groaned and there were scattered catcalls. "But," he added hastily, "there is security in reach of all mankind—not from without but from within—*security of soul.*"

A voice: "Why are we poor and hungry?"

"You are poor in spirit and you hunger for the truth."

Another voice: "Why are we slaves?"

"You are slaves to your illusions—to phantom chains you have forged around your necks. Greed and fear are the shackles which confine you in your dark and narrow cells." He paused to wipe his face and noted with dismay, as any speaker might, that great numbers of people had gone out. Still, the majority remained and you couldn't hope . . .

A voice: "What of charity?"

"Charity begins at home," he answered rather sharply with a hint of the oracular. "See to it that you do not stint your soul."

A woman's voice: "And love?"

"Yes? Love?" repeated Mr. Littlejohn.

The voice, remotely, timidly: "I mean—cannot love save the world?"

"Rephrase your question, madam," he replied with a note of irritation, "for of your nonexistent world I will not speak. Can love save *me*? Is that what you would ask? Well then, I do not know. What do you mean by *love*? What does it *mean* to you? What does it make you feel or hear or see? *Something* will save you, madam, but I cannot tell you what. *You* are the captain of your soul."

Voices: "It's too complicated." "It's too hard."

"On the contrary," Mr. Littlejohn spoke almost angrily, "it

is too simple and too easy. You are wedded to the idea that life is a great mystery and you will be content with nothing else. *Too simple and too easy*, I repeat. No formulae to memorize, no ritual to perform, no priests, no sackcloth and no ashes, no mortifying of the flesh, no penitential torture, no cabalistic creeds, no dogma and no heresy, no wooden images or plaster idols, no hell and no damnation—none of the empty trappings which human minds call God. I say to you again: it is *too* simple and *too* easy. You are asked to *live* and to *enjoy*, in the fullness of its measure, every warm sweet breath of life. *Is that too hard?*"

Voices: "No, no." "Tell us more." "Go on."

A dissenting voice: "It's pagan."

"Why so it is," said Mr. Littlejohn, "and Christian too. It is not new and I am not a prophet but only, like yourselves, a humble seeker. It has come echoing down the ages—stated in a hundred different ways—translated, interpreted, distorted—pure gold transmuted into dross in hollow theological discussions—beclouded and bewhiskered—buried in the offal of stupid superstition under mountains of intolerance, persecution, and dispute—but still untarnished and *still true*."

A woman's voice, anxiously: "But—we're not intended to enjoy ourselves."

"Are we not, madam?" He spoke with gentle irony and he found her with his eye though she stood a hundred yards away. "Are we not indeed? Pray tell me then: *if life isn't fun—what is it?*"

Thousands of voices: "Yes, yes." "He's right." "He's put his finger on the thing." "If it isn't fun, what is it?" "Go on." "Go on."

Mr. Littlejohn glanced at his watch. "My friends, the time is growing short, and what more is there to say? Life *has* a purpose: the development and growth of the individual soul. There is no death; all that is *real* survives, but the fabric of illusion is as fragile as the grave cloth. Salvation is within

the reach of every human being but *each man must find it for himself*." He looked out across the broken ranks as if to pronounce a benediction.

"In conclusion let me quote you very briefly from the words of a great teacher—words so oft repeated they have lost their simple meaning: 'The kingdom of heaven is within you.'" He paused; he could almost hear the beating of their hearts. "'Know thyself and the truth will set thee free.'" And he repeated slowly: *know yourself*—in any way, by any means you can—*and the truth will set you free.*"

There was thunderous and prolonged applause. Mr. Littlejohn had taken several bows and was preparing to retire from the platform when suddenly a voice rang out above the multitude: "Blackjohn for president!" Another voice repeated it, and then another and another. "Blackjohn for president!" In a moment it had run like prairie fire—a hundred thousand voices chanting: "Blackjohn for president!"

Mr. Littlejohn turned back with outstretched arms and horror in his eyes. "My friends, my friends—" It was some time before he could be heard. "My friends—no doubt I should feel flattered at this mark of your appreciation—" He shook his head and his voice was very weary. "—but I am appalled that you should so far misunderstand what I have said. I cannot be your president—nor do you need a president."

A voice: "But who will lead us then?"

More voices: "Yes, yes." "We want a leader." "Who will lead us?"

Mr. Littlejohn mustered all his strength. "*Beware of leadership!*" A gasp went through the audience, a mighty sigh of disappointment. "Beware of the swamis and the prophets—of cult and creed! Beware of those that say to you, 'I know,' for they know not—of those who point the way, for their feet are not upon the path. Beware of little men who lust for power or acclaim—not free from greed and fear but reflecting the illusions of the world as the mirror of a telescope condenses rays

of light. *Beware of leadership*—religious or political—crutches that are weaker than your limbs, yet which, if you shall lean upon, will rob you of the strength to stand alone. Beware of dictators, of kings, and of the mob—yes, and of presidents too, for they are crying in the wilderness and they lead you on false paths and in pursuit of phantoms."

Excited voices: "Down with the dictators!" "Down with the kings!" "Down with the presidents!" And one enthusiast proclaimed, "Down with everything!"

"Beware of leadership," shouted Mr. Littlejohn, "*except the leadership of your own soul.* Rely on that and you shall find your way through the mountains and the desert, on the sea or the ice caps of the poles. No man is ever lost who listens to the voice within himself. My friends! My friends——"

But the crowd was out of hand. "Down with the Nazi!" "Down with the communists!" "Down with the Jews!" Banners were torn into shreds; noncombatants were fleeing for their lives. "Down with parliamentary systems! with majorities—minorities." "Down with the pope!" The whole arena was in pandemonium.

"No! No! No!" roared Mr. Littlejohn in a voice which Graham would have envied. "Stop, I say!" He commanded the attention of the remnant that remained. "Not *down*—not down with anything—but *up* and on your way with the strength and courage of the free-born soul. The goal is in your view, but think not you can climb to it on the bodies of the slain. Not down, I say, but *up and on—alone!*"

Voices protesting in accents of horror: "Alone?" "No, no." "We can't do that." "Alone?" "Who ever heard of such a thing?" "The man is mad." "No, not alone."

"*Alone,*" thundered Mr. Littlejohn. "Alone you came into the world; alone you leave it; alone you live your little span, and in the darkest hours of your lives you truly know you are alone."

Voices: "We can't." "We won't." "The hell with it."

"*Alone,*" repeated Mr. Littlejohn, but his strength was failing now. "There is no other way, and woe to you in the hour of your need if you have not learned to walk alone. There are no markers on the trail, nor any trail, for each must carve his own—no footprints in the sand, no voice to guide you in the night but the voice within yourself, no hand to clasp except your own. *But there is life—*" His voice rose in a final desperate effort. "Yes, life, my friends—eternal life from which you came, to which you go. *While there is life you cannot be alone, for you are part of it.* All else is temporal—illusions of a phantom world which some day will abandon you and crumble into dust. But the soul of life remains, and *in unity of soul is the only real companionship.*"

He staggered back and wiped the sweat out of his eyes, and when he opened them again his heart sank to his shoes. The stadium was empty; in the distance the last banners were floating through the exits. Not one of all that mighty throng remained. Not one? He scrutinized the field. Yes, there was one—one solitary man. He stood close by the rostrum, almost beneath its lip, and he was looking up and—smiling . . .

"My friend," Mr. Littlejohn said gently, "why do you remain when all the rest have gone?" The man came closer, smiling, but did not reply. "I ask you *why*? Do you agree with my remarks or——"

"It's the janitor," the chairman whispered in his ear, "and he is deaf."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn.

"Still," the chairman murmured cheerfully, "all things considered, I think it went off very well."

"*Well?* You think it went off *well*?" His smoldering passion flamed. "They are hypocrites and liars. They do not want to know the truth. To save their world or save themselves they would not alter by a hair the habits of their lives or the pattern of their thoughts. They want someone to tell them what to do and what to think, to hold their hands, to tuck them into bed,

to feed them with a spoon. They want to go to heaven with their families and their friends and the members of their clubs."

"Well—" the chairman shrugged, "of course they're—human."

"Yes, human—*human*—" He choked. "Forgive me, please. I—I am not myself." And he turned away and hurried down the steps with Pickles, who had slept through the proceedings, close behind him. Yes, they were human; that was their weakness and their strength. He trudged across the sand. To his quickened senses the stones and pebbles of the desert were flotsam of the hippodrome: peanut shells, empty cans and bottles, seat cushions, and the helmets of the fallen—the stench of improvised latrines. He ran.

Black clouds obscured the sun; thunder rolled and echoed from the cliffs; forked lightning stabbed the sky. A snake slid from his path and writhed into a coil, rattling its threat of death and daring him with eyes like points of venom. He fled. The silent city, cold and gray and dead—looked down on him disdainfully. The pot upon the window ledge leered like the pupil of a sightless eye.

Stumbling, slipping, falling, he reached the waterfall at last and clambered down the cliff in desperate haste, dragging the shivering dog behind him, and whisked across the ledge beneath the cataract as nimbly as an artist on a tight rope. And he was just in time, for the freshet which had arched the stream above his head, subsided the instant he had crossed. The curtain fell; the stage was dark. The apron he had trod was buried under tons of foaming water. No thoroughfare—perhaps forever.

"Hum—" Suppose that he had been too late—suppose he had been left alone in the empty hippodrome with nothing but the memory of his failure. *Alone?* He caught his breath. Back and forth he splashed across the creek, not even looking for the stepping stones. He was cold and wet and hungry . . .

But there was food and warmth and company—just around the corner. He ran on, panting with exhaustion. Yes, there was

Usgob—Blackbeard, rather—looming in the dusk. But there was no welcoming beacon in the trailer—no sight or sound of life.

"Myra!—Mirabel!" His throat tightened and his heart stood still as he stumbled up the steps. "Myra! Peter! Mirabel!" He struck a match. There was a note upon the table. He struck a dozen more to read it.

Dear Humfry

I hope thats how you spell it, I have to go to Hollywood with Mister Kincaid and his friend right now, there in an awful hurry, they want that I shud sign a contrack for Mirabel but I aint signing nothing till I hear from uncle Ben, the hamburgers in mason jars in the pool down in the crick, you know where and plenty canned goods on the shelfs, I would of made some biscits but didn have no time as Mister Kincaid wants to go right now and is wateing for me in his car, will be back as soon as I can make it and hope you get along alright

as ever
Myra

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. He found a candle end and looked around. The stove burned gasoline and he did not know how to light it; it was likely to explode unless you did. There was no wood to make a fire in the street and anyway he had no heart for it. He selected a can of beans and one of apricots, but the can opener defied him. It was a strange affair with little wheels and he struggled with it vainly.

"Here I am," he muttered to himself, "a modern man in the modern world—freezing and starving in the midst of warmth and plenty. I cannot light the stove; I cannot cook my food; I cannot even get it from this can where technology has stored it for my need. In all the years that I have lived I have not learned the elementary lessons of providing for myself. I am only a cog in a machine. I have no decent pride or confidence in the strength of my two hands or the resource of my mind. If the monstrous engine falters, I am lost."

He threw the can opener aside and gashed the lids with the bread knife and a hatchet. He gashed his finger too, and the

blood trickled down into the beans. Mirabel's rag doll, and F. D.'s diapers drying on the line . . . A lump rose in his throat and he fled out to the steps and sat there in the dark, spooning beans out of the can. Pickles pawed his knee and whined; he, too, was cold and hungry. But Mr. Littlejohn, absorbed in gloomy thought, spoke sharply, and the dog crawled away with his tail between his legs and sadly dug up bones he had buried by the porch in a happier and more abundant day.

To whom had he spoken in the amphitheater?—that mighty audience gathered from the corners of the earth? Why, to himself of course. He had been the audience and the lecturer; he had asked the questions and he had answered them. He had proposed this test of his philosophy: to argue it before himself, to look it in the face and tear it down if he should have the strength, to find the weakest links and break them if he could . . . He sighed and shook his head. *He* had been the victim of the universal panic—had stampeded his own *self*. Where was it now? the brave clear vision and the fine glib phrase? Words, words, words! And that was all.

He had had them in the hollow of his hand almost to the end, satisfied dissent of every sort, tested every link, answered every question. He went over them again. The woman who had asked him about *love* . . . Well, he had hedged a little there, as public speakers often do; had answered a question with a question. What did she mean by *love*? And it was fair enough —*what did she mean?* He could not reproach himself with that. And yet, with victory in his grasp, something had gone wrong—some loophole or some flaw—and everything had crashed. As if his own clairvoyant eye had seen the ordeal he must meet and had foreseen his failure.

"Alone—" he groaned. "No, no, I cannot go alone. I can't. It doesn't work—but why?—oh, *why*?"

Pickles came running back with something in his mouth which he dropped upon the step, and he barked and wagged his tail, hoping perhaps that now he should be fed.

"What have we here, my friend?" He picked it up, and then he stared and held it for a long time in his hand. It was Mirabel's toy elephant—not *de*materialized at all—nor *re*materialized, but resurrected from the grave by a small dog hunting bones. Pickles had carried it away and buried it, and now he brought it back, and that was all. Was life no more than that?—a planless chaos whose enigma could only be explained by mischievous canine whims? He groaned again while Pickles barked and pleaded, and then suddenly contrition filled his heart.

"Yes, yes, my friend, I see—I understand. Forgive me, please. I—I am not quite myself." And he emptied out the beans upon the step. "I am sorry to have been so selfish and so thoughtless." The dog who could not feed himself—the domesticated beast deprived of his inheritance by the brutal will of man. The deadly parallel: Pickles and himself—two helpless creatures in a helpless world . . .

He felt that he could stand no more and, with panic mounting in his breast, he jumped up from the step and rushed across the street to Homer's place. But Homer was not there; no one was there, and he had known what it would be, deep in his heart, before he put his hand upon the door. Homer's place had vanished. Nothing was there except a front—Oregon pine—condemned, and painted canvas—a tawdry, hollow motion-picture set. Usgob or Blackbeard—what did it matter now?

"Come, come," he said between his teeth. "Courage, Blackjohn! If something disappears, there *must* be something else. When you begin to *need* someone, it is time—" But a dry sob choked his utterance. He turned and ran out of the door, across the dark deserted street, down to the creek. And he tore off his dripping clothes and cowered in his bed—a little man of middle age, cold, hungry, and—*alone*.

"Oh, God," he whispered to himself, "why have you forsaken me?" The blanket slipped back from his eyes and he was conscious of the stars. Yes, there they were—packed in the sky like silver pins upon a purple cushion. They had not changed

nor faltered in their courses. The moon would rise; already there was warning of its visit. The sun would come tomorrow—the winter and the spring, the summer and the fall—the flowers and the snow, and then again the flowers. Over and over and over *life would live . . .*

XII

THE DAYS WENT BY—WARM SUNNY days, but the nights were getting colder.

Mr. Littlejohn abandoned his urban activities entirely and retired to the country. He moved a stock of canned goods and the utensils he required into a clump of willows by the creek, and he built a fireplace of stones which served to cook his food and to warm him in the evening.

He was torn by conflicting stresses: though some progress had been made, the enigma was unsolved, and Usgob could contribute nothing further to his quest. He was anxious to be off, but he felt he had a duty as custodian. There was of course another road, by which Kincaid had come, which was probably less hazardous, and he seriously debated the idea of attempting to drive out but postponed a decision in the matter, expecting every day that Myra would return.

He never went to town; he simply did not have the heart to face the empty street and gutted houses. With the cooking and the laundry, wood to chop and little things to mend, his time was fairly occupied—fortunate the man whose emotional problems are forgotten in the struggle to survive—but there were certain hours which were painfully hard to live through: the twilight of the day, when men with homes are going there and homes are waiting for them with welcoming fire on the hearth and bright, expectant faces. Home—*security*. Beware that hour, you who walk alone, whose waiting table holds one plate, one cup. Yes, he wanted a companion—a *real one* in the flesh—the music of a human voice . . .

In the afternoons he walked—often to the waterfall. But he always found the curtain down and the stage of Armageddon as remote as the memory of a dream. Still, he had no wish to visit it again; it had served its purpose and was finished. He would sit down in his rocky chair and play upon his mouth organ, or sometimes just reflect. Pride went before a fall, and such falls, though distressing, were no doubt salutary in effect. His philosophy was sound; he repeatedly examined every link. The only trouble with it was that it had failed to work. The prescription was a guaranteed specific, but—it didn't cure. The perfect ship, faultlessly designed, had sunk the very moment it was launched.

"Pickles, my friend," he said one day, "we have simply gone too fast, confusing the sweet fruit of observation with the lemon of experience, substituting objectivity, on which the world's illusions have been built, for the acid test of individual use. We have made the common generalizing error. *I* am *I*, and the problem is *my own. My* flesh is weak and the veil of *my* illusion very tough. And far from being free to engage *myself* with Life, I am locked up in my cell with a ball and chain around my neck, looking at it through a heavily grated window." He rose and slowly paced beside the torrent.

"Symbols are confusing, and the cell and ball and chain involve apparent paradox, for, to escape out of your individual cell, it is first essential for you to get in—turn in, in order to get out. 'Know thyself and the truth will set thee free.' Yes, that is a clear statement of the fact. But *I* do not know *myself*, nor have I any formula to cultivate acquaintance. I do not hear the voice within my soul, and though I am convinced that the kingdom of heaven is right here within my reach, still, unless or until I find the key, to all practical intents, I am talking through my hat." He sighed with his eyes upon the tumbling cataract.

"There is Life and here am *I*, and we cannot get together. Some ingredient is left out of the prescription or the stuff has

been improperly compounded. The jigsaw puzzle is not yet complete; there is a fragment missing." He shook his head and sighed again. "Courage, my friend!" he said as heartily as he could, and Pickles roused and barked. "Good!" He smiled approval. "That is the proper spirit. We will get to the bottom of this thing. It is not quite as easy as we thought, but—*we will get there.*"

He strolled back down the creek and stopped at the garage to get the news. Everything was quiet on the western front. No more U. S. Treasury gold certificates had appeared in circulation and the army of G men had dispersed to other undertakings. J. Edgar Hoover, on his return to Washington, had issued a final statement to the press: the Department of Justice had closed its Black Beard file on the reasonable assumption that the criminal was dead.

Mr. Littlejohn smiled skeptically and was about to cut the switch when another news item commanded his attention.

A body found in the East River and thought at first to be that of Horatio Littlejohn, missing Rosydent executive, had not been identified . . .

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn and leaned back in his seat.

The radio went on: No ransom notes had been received and the theory of foul play had been abandoned by authorities and members of the family. It was thought that the missing man, temporarily unbalanced by business difficulties and suffering from ill-health, had taken his life in a moment of despondency. But the circumstances might remain a mystery. Mrs. Littlejohn and daughter, Miss Julia Littlejohn, were traveling in Europe. Thomas Littlejohn, son of the deceased, now chairman of the board of Rosydent, had issued a statement to the press. "My father," he had said, "was much misunderstood. The broadness of his point of view and the tolerance of his nature involved him in many complications. He was simply not adapted to the tempo or mutations of contemporary life."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn again. He felt rather pleased

with this description of himself. Yes, well . . . His wife and daughter were traveling in Europe as wives and daughters often did when death came knocking at the door. His son, now sitting at the head of that long, ugly table where he had sat away his life, had paid a decent tribute to his memory. His son, his daughter . . . He winked the tears out of his eyes. But it was not of Tom and Julia he was thinking, but of two little tikes in leather leggins and collars trimmed with astrakhan, romping in a snowdrift in the park nearly twenty years ago. He *did* miss them, but he had missed them for a long, long time and would not find them anywhere again. Life did not pause—did not retrace its steps; it went right on, so—*make the most of it* . . .

"The tempo and mutations of contemporary life—" He addressed a pair of wood rats who had built themselves a nest in the back seat of the car, removing the upholstery for the purpose. "Yes, my friends, that is certainly one trouble with the world. And no one is immune. Nobody can keep up with the pace that has been set; the physical machine is rocking on its bearings—flywheels tearing loose and bursting into fragments—hearts and heads and hopes entangled in the wreckage. You are never given time to get used to anything: highways, cities, or ideas—they begin to tear them up before they get them down." The wood rats peeked at him through the naked springs with melancholy eyes.

"Quite so, quite so—" He sighed and went on musing to himself. Man was at least a hundred years behind his own inventions. No sooner had he begun to get acquainted with the printing press than they took away his books and gave him pictures. And when he had resigned himself to staying in one place, they handed him a motorcar and told him to get started. But—they didn't tell him *where* to go or *why*. The doctors had prolonged his life but they had no opinion as to what he ought to do with it. They could keep him alive with ingenious little tricks, but they couldn't keep him *well* and his ailments multi-

plied. The truth was that he couldn't live in comfort with the things that he created; he was back a hundred years behind the times.

But his soul was much further back than that—grounded on a sand bar in the medieval sea—right where the church had left him when it threatened Galileo with the stake. The path divided there, and one had stopped at a dead end while the other ran away like a brakeless locomotive with the engineer left sitting at the crossing. Only part of the man was on the train, and not the part that mattered. Well, you couldn't split yourself in two without genuine discomfort: one hand in holy water and the other on the button of a ten-tube radio—a dislocating stretch. The Gothic soul in a streamlined world—steel and concrete with cathedral glass—swing music from pipe organs—a cocktail in a chalice—the sacrament in cellophane . . .

As he was strolling homeward Pickles bristled like a porcupine and growled, and, peering through the dusk, he saw the figure of a man standing with his back to them, staring at the trailer. His straight black hair fell to his shoulders, and around his forehead was a band of colored cloth. An Indian. Mr. Littlejohn ran forward eagerly; he was trembling with excitement.

"How," he said, remembering this to be an aboriginal form of greeting which he felt would be agreeable to a red man. The Indian turned his head and then looked back at the trailer; there was no expression on his face at all. But Mr. Littlejohn went on; he explained about the trailer at great length, mentioning Myra and the children and even Uncle Ben. He led the way into the street and, opening the door of the hotel, pointed out the folding beds, the stove, the lamp, the toilet, and the shower.

"Can sleep—can eat—can see—can wash—can all time do and same time go." He was pleased with this description which seemed graphic and complete. "Heap good!" he added brilliantly. But the Indian said nothing.

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. He felt exhausted but relieved;

his immediate social needs were satisfied, and he continued in less primitive vernacular. "As regards this hybrid vehicle which engrosses your attention, I renounce all right and title and you are welcome to it. But I warn you, my friend, that its seductions are illusory; in fact it is a sham. You cannot light the lamp nor cook upon the stove; the water will not run unless you fill the tank. The ark cannot be moved without a supplementary engine and the tires are both flat." He stepped back with an expansive gesture. "Take it, my friend, and the consequences with it, as Atlas took the world upon his shoulders." He nodded pleasantly and strolled away, leaving the Indian standing in the door.

Later, as he kneeled beside the fire fashioning a hamburger, he reflected that the human need for social intercourse was largely a craving for an audience. The sense of what you said was unimportant; the real consideration was the *sound*. To be heard was what human beings wanted. It gave them the illusion of *belonging*, of being part of something—a fraudulent security, like whistling in the dark.

He dropped the hamburger into the skillet and heard its genial sizzle. The gregarious impulse was a harmless one. Danger was seldom in a *thing*, but in failure to recognize it—in mistaking it for something else. Social life was pleasant and desirable, but it was what it was and nothing more: a boutonnière to wear on the lapel of your coat—*if* you had a coat. But if you didn't . . . He flipped the fragrant morsel in the skillet. Well, it was no good to delude yourself with the idea that a boutonnière would shed the rain or keep you warm.

"My friend," he addressed the absent Indian, "I have enjoyed our visit which typifies the average social function. It is true you did not speak but that is unimportant. I have sat through many dinners where the rattle of the silver was the most intriguing sound. I repeat, I have enjoyed our visit—but if I never see you on this earth again, it will not matter to me in the

least." And he presently retired with the comfortable sensation of having come home from a party.

Next day, returning in the twilight from his walk, he was startled to observe a light inside the trailer. Myra had come back, he thought, and he ran toward the hotel with a thrill of expectation. But Myra had not come. The Indian was sitting on the porch with his feet cocked on the railing. The door was open; the lamp was burning cozily; the stove, judging from an appetizing odor, was functioning perfectly. A woman came into the doorway, a young and comely squaw with a papoose in her arms. They stared at Mr. Littlejohn who stared back, speechless with amazement. Their gaze was neither friendly nor unfriendly; it was not anything.

"How——"

No answer. They did not speak or smile or nod, or otherwise evince the slightest hint of an emotion. A minute ticked away; it seemed as though their empty, level gaze might go on through eternity.

"Heap how—" he gulped, backing toward the shadow. "I—I mean, heap—good—" But his voice died in his throat and, screened by Nick Shine's mortuary parlor, he turned and ran, and Pickles ran behind him with his tail between his legs.

Centuries of Aryan culture put to flight by the aboriginal eye. He sat down on his bed to get his breath. Silence was a thing that had no handle; there was nothing to take hold of. Like a coin on glass or the greased torso of a wrestler, it could not be grasped.

"Pickles, my friend," he said, "the modern man fears silence as his forebears feared the devil. Sound and fury lull him to repose; with excursion and alarm he is on familiar terms; the pandemonic bedlam of the monkey cage is his natural habitat. But with silence he is helpless—trembling and afraid—face to face with the terrifying mystery of his life." He paused and reflected for a moment. "Silence is the weapon of the gods—a

calm in the tempest of illusion—a mirror which reflects fleeting glimpses of the soul."

He did not speak again until he was in bed with Pickles cuddled at his feet. And then he said with calm deliberation, "The new custodian has arrived. I shall leave here in the morning."

He kept his word.

Promptly after breakfast he repaired to the garage, and pushed and pulled and stepped on things until the motor started. It was in low gear by fortunate chance, and the car plowed through the wall with the roof of Tom Snook's livery on its back, tore down a length of hitching rail and headed like an arrow straight for the Paris Belles.

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn, struggling manfully with the wheel. It did not handle like a boat—quite the contrary in fact; you steered it the way you meant to go. The wood rats in the back squealed and scampered back and forth, and Pickles fairly foamed. "Steady, my friend—" He got back off the sidewalk just in time, but another length of hitching rail went down. "I believe I've got the hang of it——"

They zigzagged down the street at a horse and buggy pace which seemed unduly rapid but he knew no way to check it. The Indians were standing on the porch; he glimpsed them from the corner of his eye—not a flicker of expression on their faces. Well, let them look like that. The aboriginal eye would disturb his peace no more. Still, he wished that he knew what they were thinking.

There was Homer's place—Oregon pine, condemned. He had not seen it since that dreadful night when the world of make-believe and all its pleasant company had been stampeded into flight. Here came Bullwing's office. Good old Bullwing. Heigh-ho! And there—the little millinery shop with her name in the corner of the window—"Mary Jones."

"Good-by, my dear," he called. "Good-by—" He let go of

the wheel to wave his hand and the pole of Billy's Barber Shop came crashing to the ground. A tear rolled down his nose.

"Courage!" he cried. "If something disappears, there is always something else." Pickles barked agreement. "That is the proper spirit for a dog or for a man. We are embarked once more in pursuit of the enigma."

The school fled slowly by. Usgob was gone. The road, rutted and untraveled, wound along the valley floor beside the stream. Yes, he had got the hang of it, could really drive the thing. Necessity, the mother of invention, was there to guide his hand. By cautious trial and error he identified the foot pedals and ascertained their functions. The gear shift lever then received attention; he found the neutral channel and let it go at that. He had no need of any greater speed.

A mountain blocked the path. He gripped the wheel and clamped his teeth. "Courage, Blackjohn, courage!" But nature had provided for his safety. A narrow canyon pierced the granite wall and the road ambled on beside the stream. The midday sun beat down; the wood rats slept, exhausted by their panic; Pickles dozed and drooled. They crawled ahead, hour after hour . . .

His arms and legs were numb; his back ached like a tooth. The water boiled away through the radiator vent; the engine pistons hammered in an agony of protest. Clouds gathered in the sky; a penetrating wind swept down from the mountains; rain began to fall. He stopped and made a shawl out of a blanket, securing it around his neck with one of F. D.'s diaper pins.

It poured. The wagon tracks were rivers and the gullies ran like torrents. On—on—on—hour after hour. Would there never be an end to it? His eyes were blurred with strain; he was cold and wet and hungry . . . "Courage, Blackjohn, courage!"

A thick, wet night was falling when they came around a curve and emerged on Highway 93 within sight of Boulder Dam. They had traveled thirty miles in seven hours. There was a gaily lighted service station at the intersection and Mr. Little-

john steered into it and sank back in his seat with a great sigh of relief.

Three brisk and smiling boys descended on the wreck which was empty of water, gas, and oil. They filled up everything, including the tires which were practically flat. And then they scraped the mud off the windows and the windshield.

"I'll brush her out in back," said one, and he seized a vacuum cleaner and opened the rear door. The wood rats scampered up his arm and leapt to freedom in the night. "Holy God—" He dropped the vacuum and retreated.

"I beg your pardon—" Mr. Littlejohn looked out of the window.

"Rats—" gasped the boy.

"Oh, yes, my rats—they live there——"

"Yeah?" said the boy in a very doubtful voice. He slammed the door and did not come near again.

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn and sighed with mild regret. His rats had gone—in violation of tradition, had abandoned the ship when it was not sinking. But perhaps they were right and he was wrong. The clairvoyant rodent eye might see further than the moment . . . He paid the bill. "Could you tell me where I might find a restaurant?"

"Las Vegas—straight ahead."

"Thank you very much." He drove onto the highway with a qualm of apprehension. Cars and trucks whizzed by; headlights soared like rockets. He sat up very straight with a tight grip on the wheel and crawled along the edge at a neolithic pace. He was blinded by the glare and deafened by the noise. Impatient drivers honked and zipped around him.

Now they were on the dam which blazed with lamps, winking and blurring in the rain. He looked across the parapet: a savage river ironed flat into a placid lake—the hand of nature stayed. Turbines hummed and throbbed. *Light and power.* The restless will of man capturing thunder, chaining lightning, moving mountains, curbing tides. But *why?* and to what end? Armies

of kilowatts—obedient hordes waiting for their orders. *But what to do with them?* The human engine atrophied beneath its doubtful blessings and the soul still dwelt in candlelight while the servants in the house ran up and down the stairs carrying gadgets no one wanted into rooms where no one went. Heigh-ho! He felt a sudden pang of loneliness and hurried on, anxious for the silent, friendly darkness of the night.

It was still raining hard when, an hour later, they crawled into Las Vegas: neon lights, shop windows, flashing signs, slot machines in batteries, open grocery fronts, moving-picture theaters, radios screaming through loud-speakers, lunch counters, cocktail bars, wide-open doors with gambling games in sight, hotels and barber shops, butchers, bakers, drug stores, sandwiches and sodas, everything in fact—blah and blah and blah—light and power running wild.

He crept along the parking line and tacked into a vacant space in front of the entrance to "The Palace." Through the open doors he could see one end of an inviting bar and on the other side a row of roulette tables, and farther back in a blue haze of smoke were other games of chance. The place was full of people. He watched them going in and out: farmers, cowboys, miners, tourists, men and women, old and young, rich and poor . . . But it was not like Usgob, not at all. He sighed. He felt himself a stranger.

"Pickles, my friend," he said, "let us rest for a few moments and contemplate this scene before we venture into it." Pickles wagged his tail.

The rain pattered gently on the top; the engine chugged away. He dozed and roused with his foot upon the clutch, and dozed and roused, and then . . .

He was in a large and lofty room which was carpeted in black and draped with velvet. There were no doors or windows or furnishings of any kind, but in the very center, apparently suspended in the air and surrounded by an incandescent halo, was a golden microphone.

He observed that one end of the room had been reserved for spectators with footmen in knee breeches standing guard. Everybody of importance seemed to be there, including all the members of the diplomatic staff, waiting in hushed, expectant silence. A solemn-looking man in a white tie emerged from the shadow and approached him. "We are ready, sir," he said, and, motioning Mr. Littlejohn to follow him, he moved toward the microphone with a slow and measured tread. And now a narrow section of the velvet wall slid back, revealing the control room with white-faced technicians bending over instruments and switchboards. They waited; the atmosphere was breathless with suspense.

At last—a mellow chime. Mr. Littlejohn's conductor raised his hand for silence which was already thick enough to slice, advanced a final step and spoke into the microphone. "This is the World," he said, "broadcasting to the Universe—an epoch-making moment in the history of our planet. Science has provided us with means to send our message out into the farthest realms of interstellar space. The spoken word of man shall be heard among the stars." He paused while the tension in the room climbed another notch, and then he added, "Mr. Humphrey Blackjohn will address you—" And he stepped back from the microphone and signed to Mr. Littlejohn to take his place.

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn as he took a faltering step and stared in horrified dismay at the disc of burnished gold. What should he say? What *could* he say? *What was there to be said?* His throat was dry; his tongue was wobbly and inert. He tried to speak and coughed instead. In a haze he saw the white technician faces pressed against the glass. They were making frantic gestures and mouthing silent words. Sweat trickled down his back and his knees began to sway. Confound them anyway! If they must invent monsters of this sort, they should be compelled to do the talking.

"The Universe is waiting, sir," the white tie whispered in his ear. "Hum—" gulped Mr. Littlejohn and coughed again. The

room was swimming, the golden disc revolving like a pin wheel. He was dizzy; he was fainting; but he made a supreme effort. "My friends—I regret—" Everything was turning black. "—but—I have nothing—to say—" The microphone exploded with a crash and the air was filled with fragments which sailed about like comets. He was falling—falling——

He was on the floor beneath the wheel, tangled up with Pickles who was yelping in distress. The clutch had been released and the car, leaping like a kangaroo, had rammed into the bumper of the one ahead. A rat-faced man was leaning from the window, shouting colorful abuse.

"You lousy punk, I oughta paste you one—" He backed up viciously and whammed the Chevrolet.

Mr. Littlejohn alighted and inspected both cars carefully but could see no sign of damage. Then he looked in at the window of the other car and said, "I am really very sorry——"

"G'wan! Get out!" jerked the rat-faced man from the corner of his mouth, and shrank back in his seat.

"You have not sustained an injury," Mr. Littlejohn replied, maintaining his dignity and calm, "but if you so desire, I will summon a policeman to assure you of the fact."

"A cop?" The man was shaking like a leaf. "G'wan! You heard me—get!" He fingered something in his pocket.

"As you please—" said Mr. Littlejohn and retired from the scene, chagrined but undefeated. This town did not resemble Usgob and suffered by comparison. Cautioning Pickles to await him, he strolled into the Palace, still shawled and muffled in the blanket, one end of which trailed gracefully on the floor, and, proceeding directly to the bar, ordered an Old-fashioned. "And could I have a sandwich?"

The bartender nodded. "Ham or cheese?—on rye?"

"I should prefer a hamburger—with onions——"

"Okay, I'll send next door—" And he called a colored porter.

"Better make it two——"

"Okay. Two hamburgers with onions."

"Or—*three*—" corrected Mr. Littlejohn.

"*Three?*" The bartender looked startled.

"I would like one for my dog," Mr. Littlejohn explained.

"Okay, brother." And he called to the boy who was waiting at the door, "Make it three—two with and one without, and the one without to carry."

"Thank you very much——"

"Okay." He squinted at the blanket. "You got a cold?"

"A cold? Why, no—" Mr. Littlejohn smiled vaguely and sipped his drink which circulated warmly. "The fact is, I—" He stopped abruptly, his attention attracted by a radio on the shelf behind the bar.

"Salinas, California. Hitchhiker robbed and beaten. A youth, giving his name as Patrick Hammerstein and address New York City, was found today unconscious in a ditch near this famous lettuce town. Suffering from bruises and contusions he was taken to the hospital where he told a rambling story. In the course of a political discussion he claims he was attacked and robbed of thirteen dollars. His account of the matter is not credited and subversive literature found in his possession suggests his implication in communist activities. The sheriff's office is investigating."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. Poor Patrick! The tempo and mutations of contemporary life had blacked his eyes again. He sighed and sipped his drink which was already tingling in his toes.

Two men were standing near him at the bar, and he thought at first that one of them, in a raincoat and a cap, was the rat-faced man whose car he had bumped into. But then he saw that it was not, though it might have been his brother. The other man was young and slender with a handsome, swarthy face and black, curly hair beneath his pulled down hat. He wore a rubber poncho which came almost to his ankles and leaned with his back against the bar and his elbows on the edge of it in a careless, graceful attitude.

He appeared to be discussing something pertaining to the cashier's office which was a wire cage in the middle of the room. Several times he gestured toward it; and then he seemed to finish with the subject, dismissing objections with a shrug of negligent authority. His companion turned away and a bulge beneath his raincoat struck against the bar with a sharp metallic sound. The other man frowned and exclaimed beneath his breath; then, observing that Mr. Littlejohn was watching him, smiled pleasantly.

Mr. Littlejohn smiled back; he liked the look of this young man, the twinkle in his eye, the way he held his head, the suggestion of audacity. "Would you join me in a drink?" he said.

"*Señor*—" the young man straightened up and bowed, "you are very kind." He ordered rum.

"You do not play, sir?" ventured Mr. Littlejohn, waving a shawled arm toward the gaming tables.

"*Señor*, I do, but—not for such small stakes." He shrugged and raised his glass. "Your health, *señor*—" And he tossed the fiery liquor down his throat. Mr. Littlejohn acknowledged the compliment and drank deeply through the opening in his muffler. The young man watched this operation with a quizzical expression and inquired sympathetically, "You have the cold perhaps?"

"The cold? Oh, no!" Mr. Littlejohn laughed lightly; he was literally on fire both inside and out. "No, indeed, *señor*, but—I think I have the fever."

"The fever? Ah!" The young man smiled amusedly but vaguely. "*Señor*—" he bowed, "forgive me, please, but I have business to attend to——"

Mr. Littlejohn saluted and watched him stroll away with an easy, swinging stride till he vanished in the crowd, and then turned his attention to the hamburgers—two with and one without and the one without to carry which he put into his pocket.

"Are they okay?" said the bartender.

"Delicious."

"Will you need another drink to wash 'em down?"

"Why, so I will." The suggestion was most welcome. "Another Old-fashioned, if you please, and, er, have something yourself ——"

"Thanks, brother," said the bartender and held up a cigar. "Kind regards ——"

"Don't mention it—" He ate and drank. The second Old-fashioned was even smoother than the first; it was certainly compounded with the milk of human kindness. This town was not so unlike Usgob after all. When you got acquainted with it, there were certain marked resemblances. All towns were much alike no doubt—as much alike as men—Usgob, London, or Las Vegas—when you got beneath the surface they were very much the same . . . The radio broke in upon his thought.

"Rosydent presents a new and mammoth program. Hollywood at Home. Intimate glimpses of the stars in their most private lives. Darius Kincaid will conduct you and every door will open at his magic touch."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn.

A voice like trickling oil: "We are off with Rosydent in a fleet of motorcars. Hold on tight and hold your hats. We are off to Hollywood and—*here we go*—" (There was now a great racket of army tanks and sirens.) "*And here we are!* Jump out quickly, follow fast; we have many calls to make. We are going up a path. It's a cozy little house, just a simple little home. I can see over the wall into the garden—a swimming pool, a tennis court, and flowers—flowers—flowers. But simple, very simple, very modest. I am standing at the door. Don't crowd, my friends, don't push. I am knocking—" (Sound of ax blows.) "The door is opening now—a fine old colored mammy standing in the entrance. We have come to make a call, *a call with Rosydent.*" "But Mistuh Kincaid, suh, it's ha'f pas' eight o'clock and de lady gone to bed ——"

Mr. Littlejohn was clinging to the bar in a state of such con-

fusion that he missed part of the sequence and when he got back into step they were going up the stairs with the colored mammy wailing from the bottom:

"You dasn't wake her up 'caze she due on de set at seben in de mawnin'." "Now don't you worry, mammy; you leave everything to me. Step softly, friends, step softly. Here's a door. I turn the knob—" (Sound of a manhole cover.) "Hello! We're in the bathroom—a modest little room lined with pink Carrara marble. My mistake. Let's go—" A voice: "Wait a minute! Look! What's that there on the shelf?" Another voice in pleased surprise: "A tube of Rosydent." Third voice passionately: "*The tooth paste of the stars.*" The trickling oil again: "Right this way, friends, follow me. Don't push; don't crowd—" (Sound of stampeding cattle.) "Another door. I turn the knob. Ah, at last! S-h-h! Not a sound! A simple little room in the heart of fairyland—the bower of a fairy queen done in gold brocade and damask. What's that? A doll. And there? An ivory elephant as big as a police dog. Where are we anyway? But look! Look there—there on the bed: the fairy queen herself. Hush! Don't move! Don't breathe! She moves. She's waking up. She's sitting up in bed—a fairy bed of tortoise shell. She shakes her golden curls. She rubs her eyes. She smiles—" A moment of suspense and then—the angel voice: "Hello, everybody——"

Mr. Littlejohn tripped on the blanket and fell down but he was up again at once.

"My friends, permit me to present the newest, brightest star in Hollywood—a child of the desert—*Mirabel.*" (Terrific salvo of applause.) "Speak to them, darling, just a word, and then you can go back to sleepy land." (A pause.) The angel voice: "I am so happy in my little home with my brothers and my mummy and my papa who came back to us. God bless everybody in the world. And I want to send my love to Uncle Humpty—if he's listening, and I hope he will take good care of Pickles. I guess that's all—" (Applause and cheers.) "And God

bless you, darling Mirabel—star of the desert. Good night and pleasant dreams. This way, my friends. Don't crowd; don't push. Here we go with Rosydent—" An orchestra began to play . . .

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn and walked away with a slightly rolling gait. He was bathed in perspiration and his knees felt very queer. She had sent her love to him, to Uncle Humpty; she had even thought of Pickles. His eyes were moist and somewhat out of focus. The angel child in her bed of tortoise shell with gold brocade and damask, and swimming pools and tennis courts—and her papa who had come all the way from North Dakota, impressed at last no doubt with the wisdom of the spirits but at any rate reclaimed and united with his dear ones in the pleasant glow of opulence and pink Carrara marble . . .

He wiped his dripping face upon the blanket and then he jerked it off and threw it on the floor behind a slot machine. He did not need an overcoat; he was simply burning up. And breathing freely with occasional hiccups, he started for the door. But his sense of direction was impaired and he wound up in the crowd around a roulette table.

"I beg your pardon—" He addressed the croupier, a bored and weary-looking man, "I am, er, looking for the door——"

The croupier glanced at him and frowned, and then the marble dropped into a slot. He raked the table, paid a winner here and there, and spun the wheel again. "The door," he said pointing with his hand, "is over there. And if you are not playing, kindly step back from the table." His manner was offensive and several of the players grinned appreciation.

Mr. Littlejohn was nettled and the natural benevolence of his countenance, above the black mustache which always bristled fiercely on its own, was momentarily obscured.

"Thank you," he said coldly, "but on reconsideration I think I shall remain." And taking a roll of bills out of his pocket, he selected one at random and tossed it carelessly onto the black.

And there it lay, crisp and smooth and flat—a twenty-dollar U. S. Treasury gold certificate which was *yellow* and not green.

Nobody moved, nobody spoke, but every eye took in that twenty-dollar note and the black mustache behind it. The croupier looked away at a corner of the ceiling. He had come to Nevada for his health but he felt at this moment that the trip had been a failure. His tongue was thick and dry and he would have gladly parted with the thing to recall the snooty words that he had spoken. Cold sweat was oozing from his hands and a stack of silver dollars broke and scattered from his fingers. He did not even try to pick them up.

Mr. Littlejohn hiccuped and reached to his hip pocket for his handkerchief. "Pardon me—" he murmured, and noted with surprise that there was no one very near him though he had been rather crowded at the start. A man dropped some chips, stooped down to pick them up and failed to reappear. Another moved his lips as if in prayer, and a woman sitting on a stool beside her escort, seemed to have gone to sleep with her head upon his shoulder. It was really very strange . . .

The marble dropped and bounced from slot to slot, then settled with a click in number twelve—the color red. But still nobody moved or evinced the slightest interest and the croupier was still staring at the ceiling.

"If you please—" suggested Mr. Littlejohn with some vague idea of being helpful and dispelling the extraordinary lethargy which seemed to have settled on the game. "If you please—" And he pointed to the wheel which was still revolving slowly.

The croupier roused as from a dream and, seizing his rake, began to clear the table of everything in sight except the twenty-dollar note which reposed upon the black. He raked away the winning stakes which were wagered on the red and also several chips which were quartered in the twelve, and, to Mr. Littlejohn's amazement, no one made a protest.

"One moment please—" he said as severely as he could, and

paused to hiccup. "Pardon me. It is customary, I believe, to pay the winning players."

"Yes, sir," said the croupier or at least made the motions with his lips, and, dropping his rake, he grabbed a stack of silver dollars and planked it down beside the yellow note.

Mr. Littlejohn could not believe his eyes. "No, no," he said, "you are making a mistake."

"Sorry, sir," the croupier muttered and he fumbled for another stack which he put down by the first.

Mr. Littlejohn was thoroughly disgusted. "Take those away," he said.

"Yes, sir—" The croupier picked them up but halfway to the rack he dropped them both, and silver dollars rolled around and dripped onto the floor.

"And *that*," commanded Mr. Littlejohn pointing to his stake.

"Yes, sir—" The wretched man picked up the bill and held it by a corner as if it burned his fingers. "What—what shall I do with it?"

"Do with it?" the floor was swaying slightly and his vision was not clear. At times he saw two croupiers and two twenty-dollar bills. The whole thing was most annoying—an example of incredible incompetence. "*Do with it?*" The croupier closed his eyes and shuddered.

"Why, sir—" Mr. Littlejohn began and paused to hiccup. "Pardon me—" He drew himself up sternly and pointed his finger at the man. "Why, sir, I am ashamed of you. *Ashamed.*" He looked around and rapped the table sharply with his knuckles. "I am ashamed of all of you."

A woman moaned and toppled from her stool onto the floor. Nobody moved; nobody spoke.

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn and pausing to survey them all with scornful disapproval, he turned away and walked slowly toward the door.

The brother of the rat-faced man was standing near the entrance leaning against the wall and fingering something under-

neath his coat. It was still raining and the rat-faced man himself was still sitting in his car and the engine was still running with little puffs of vapor coming from the muffler. Mr. Littlejohn observed these matters vaguely but remembered them more clearly later on. He got into the back seat of his car and sat down upon the springs which the rats had picked quite bare. Pickles woke and sniffed, and then wagged his tail and barked.

"Patience, my friend," smiled Mr. Littlejohn. "The evening has been a most confusing one, still I have not overlooked your needs." He took the hamburger from his pocket and spread it on the paper on the floor. "There, my friend, fall to. And remember, if you can, to insist upon your rights in any game you play and regardless of the stakes—whether hamburgers or dollars or a woman or a kingdom, for nothing will be added to the stature of the soul by submitting to injustice."

He was interrupted by a shot and the sound of shattering glass, and he sat up quickly and looked out of the window. Two men were coming through the door, both of them masked with handkerchiefs below their eyes, the first one in a poncho with a canvas sack beneath his arm, and the second, in a raincoat, stumbling after him, looking back over his shoulder, with something in his arms that resembled a machine gun and the end of which was smoking.

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. His car was rolling gently like a boat, and the picture was blurred and the action very fast. Inside the Palace not a human being was in sight, and some people approaching on the sidewalk, turned and ran the other way. The motor of the car in front raced into a roar and the first man had his hand upon the door—the whole thing had not occupied three seconds—when the second man either tripped or slipped, and fell down on his face in the middle of the pavement, and the thing that he was carrying in his arms began to shoot.

Flash. Bang. The first man's hat went off and he stooped to

pick it up. Flash. Bang— Flash. Bang. A window splintered in the door. Swush—the air blew from a tire. And the rat-faced man tumbled out into the street and peeked around the rear end of the car.

"You goddam fool," he screamed, "take your finger off the trigger!" But the gun went right on shooting like a drunken roman candle. Flash. Bang— Flash. Bang— Flash. Bang— The radiator emblem sailed into the air, another tire blew, gas was pouring from the tank. "You goddam fool—" The rat-faced man was jumping up and down. "Look what you done, you sap. You shot our car to pieces."

The man with the gun was getting up but he didn't take his finger off the trigger and bullets flew about in all directions. Flash. Bang— Flash. Bang. A stop light at the corner suddenly went out and something whistled by so close to Mr. Littlejohn that he hurriedly drew back. And the next thing he knew, the man with the sack was sitting in the front seat of his car and had started up the motor, the rat-faced man was in the back beside him, and the man with the gun, with a final burst of fire that wrecked the Palace windows, made a flying leap into the front beside the driver, and they were off.

Windows were still going up, people were still running, huddling in the doorways, cars were scurrying to the curb. The rat-faced man bounced up and down upon the springs, waving a revolver and complaining bitterly:

"You goddam fool, you goddam fool, we'd oughta blow your head off."

"I never seen a gun like that," the gunman whined. "It wouldn't stop." He pulled off his mask and Mr. Littlejohn recognized him as the double of the rat-faced man, and felt sure that the driver, though he could not see his face, was none other than the young and handsome *señor* he had drunk with at the bar. He was terribly excited.

"Why didn't you take your finger off the trigger?"

"I never touched the goddam thing I tell you."

"You're a liar and we'd oughta blow your head off." They dove across a railroad track in the glare of a locomotive headlight with the whistle shrieking at them. "For chrisake, Tony——"

But the driver didn't answer. His mask had slipped down around his neck and his shoulders were shaking as if he might be laughing. Under cover of the train they ran along beside the track and then recrossed it back into the town, and sped through it on a dark and silent street. But they could hear the hue and cry—the fire siren, voices shouting. They made another turn and emerged upon a highway; they were going like the wind.

The driver knew his business, Mr. Littlejohn reflected, settling back upon the springs with a sigh of satisfaction. Yes, he drove like Uncle Ben, with brilliant, careless certainty, and wherever they were going—they would get there.

The rat-faced man began to breathe again. "What'll we do with this punk?" And he pointed with his gun in Mr. Littlejohn's direction.

"Knock him in the head and throw him out," the gunman suggested leaning back across the seat.

"Yeh," the rat-faced man agreed. "But I better see what he's got on him first. Stick up your mitts, you louse!"

Mr. Littlejohn was startled and indignant. "If robbery is your motive—" he began.

"Shut up before I plug you."

"No," Mr. Littlejohn said boldly. "You may plug me if you wish, but—" He hiccuped. "Pardon me— I will not submit to have my pockets picked. There is my money." And he flung a roll of bills down on the seat. The bandit moved to grab the roll and stepped on Pickles' tail, and Pickles promptly bit him in the leg.

"Ouch!" he yelled with pained surprise, and, seizing Pickles by the neck, was about to hurl him through the window when

Mr. Littlejohn whose irritation had been steadily mounting, sprang abruptly into action.

"Come, come," he said, "I have had enough of this." And he snatched the gun from the bandit's hand and presented it point blank.

The frightened man dropped Pickles and cowered in the corner. "Don't—don't shoot," he begged.

"I have no wish to do so," Mr. Littlejohn replied, "but there are amenities which I feel I must defend, and—" he added sternly, "respect for my dog is on the list."

"Now see what you done, you sap," the gunman wailed behind the seat, and he grabbed the driver's arm. "Hey, Tony, look! This guy back there has stuck us up." The car stopped with a jerk and the driver turned his head, snapping a flashlight on the scene.

"Ah, *señor*—" He smiled and nodded pleasantly. "We meet again."

"*Señor,* we do—" Mr. Littlejohn saluted with his weapon and, half rising from the springs, bowed as gracefully as he could with the spatial limitations. "We meet again—" He hiccuped. "Pardon me. And I should welcome the encounter as a most agreeable one but for the strange behavior of your friends."

"My friends, *señor*?" The young man laughed disdainfully. But the friends were not attending. They were staring at the seat where, among the scattered bills, crisp and smooth and flat, lay a twenty-dollar note which was *yellow* and not green.

"Oh, God—" the gunman gasped. "Look, Tony, look! *It's hot.*"

"Hot?" Mr. Littlejohn looked quickly but saw no sign of fire, and then the flashlight beam was turned upon his face and he could not see a thing.

"Black Beard—" said a strangled voice, and the rat-faced bandits plunged out of the car and vanished in the night.

"Black Beard—" Mr. Littlejohn repeated. He could not make head or tail of it. The flashlight shifted from his face. The

young man was leaning with his arms across the seat back and laughing so hard he could not speak. "But—your friends——"

"*Señor*—" Again his shoulders shook and it was some time before he could go on. "*Señor,* I assure you that they are not friends of mine but ordinary gangsters whose assistance I required for the evening."

"Oh—" Mr. Littlejohn said doubtfully. "But—where have they gone?"

"I have not the faintest notion." He dismissed the matter lightly. "But it is pleasant to be rid of them, I think."

"Yes—" Mr. Littlejohn agreed. "But—why did they go?"

"*Why, señor?*" He laughed again. "Because they fear the fire and the very name of Black Beard strikes terror to their souls."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. He turned the matter carefully in his mind but could make nothing of it.

The young man swung out of the car, walked around in front and flashed his torch upon the license plate—a New York license plate with the number 327-429. And then he came and stood in the rain beside the open window.

"*Señor* Black Beard——"

"*What?*" gasped Mr. Littlejohn clutching at the door handle. "You think—you think that I—" He stopped. A thrill shot through him like the charge of a live wire. *He—Black Beard.* His heart was churning like a turbine.

The young man shrugged and spread his hands. "*Señor,* we are wasting time whose loss we may regret."

"But I——"

"The money there beside you on the seat—those yellow bills." He smiled and shook his head. "Ah, that is brave but careless. This car in which you ride—the world is looking for it. And you, yourself, the black mustache—there is no other like it."

"No," groaned Mr. Littlejohn. "I'm not, you see. I wish I were. I would like nothing better, but——"

The young man interrupted with a gesture of impatience. "And if you are not Black Beard, then who are you?"

"Who? Why—I—" He stopped. His head was whirling like a windmill. Who *was* he indeed? Not Littlejohn—nor Blackjohn—nor some mystery man named X. Who? *Who?*

"You see, *señor*?" Again he spread his hands.

"Yes—" breathed Mr. Littlejohn. "Oh, yes—" But in plain truth he saw nothing and had never in his life been so confused.

"I am drawn to you, *señor*," the pleasant voice went on. "I should wish to be your friend. It would be for me a privilege and an honor. But I have intruded on you and no doubt upset your plans——"

"No indeed," Mr. Littlejohn protested. He had not had any plans or at least, no plans worth mentioning.

"You are too kind, *señor*. But still the fact remains that I have forced my company upon you. It is for you to say: shall we go on together or do you wish that I should leave you here?"

"Leave me—here?" Mr. Littlejohn repeated with a faint note of alarm.

"*Si, señor*. You and your car."

"But, no," Mr. Littlejohn said hastily. "I really could not hear to such a thing. I accept your friendship, *señor*, and gladly give you mine, and—let us by all means go on together."

"*Señor*—" The young man bowed.

"*Señor*—" Mr. Littlejohn half rose and cracked his head against the roof. They shook hands warmly through the open window.

"And now, *señor*—" He took his place behind the wheel—"let us leave here while we can." He looked for something on the seat, exclaimed beneath his breath and looked upon the floor, and then he laughed until the tears rolled down his cheeks. "They have taken it," he said when he could speak.

"Taken what?"

"The bag, *señor*, with the proceeds of the evening."

"Dear me! But—are you not disturbed?"

"Disturbed, *señor*?" He considered for a moment. "Why, yes, no doubt I am, but also—it is funny." He started up the car, chuckling softly to himself. "Almost everything is funny if one sees it in that way."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn and settled back upon the springs which had dented his posterior like a waffle. The mutations of contemporary life were unquestionably diverting when objectively examined, and must be just as funny when you were yourself the victim—if you could only see it in that way. But you had to get outside your cell to appreciate the humor of your own alleged disasters. To enjoy your own defeats you must sit upon the bleachers with the rest of the spectators, but—it wasn't as easy as it sounded.

He reclined with his head on a stray tuft of upholstery which the rats had overlooked. Pickles snored. A gentle breeze blew across the seat and dispersed the roll of currency; green and yellow bills fluttered here and there like vagrant autumn leaves. The warm rain splashed across the window sill bringing sweet, damp odors of the night. He drew deep breaths and felt himself inflating . . .

To be alive was the important thing—yes, just to be alive. And it didn't really matter much what happened, for if something did go wrong, there was always something else—*everywhere and all the time.* His head was aching and his mouth was dry and fuzzy, still he felt so light and so singularly happy—as if he were in love. But of course that was absurd. How could he be in love?—and too—*in love with what?*

He dismissed this notion promptly and, with that human perversity which seeks to explain every beautiful experience in terms of glandular imbalance, ascribed his sensations to the two Old-fashioned cocktails whose beneficial values had long since worn off. But his ecstasy expanded; he could scarce contain himself . . .

"*Señor*, you spoke?"

"Why, no, *señor*," Mr. Littlejohn replied and hiccuped. "Pardon me. I did not speak, *señor*. I was just—smiling—to myself ——"

And as he said these words, a twenty-dollar bill which was *yellow* and not green, fluttered through the window and vanished in the night.

XIII

MR. LITTLEJOHN AWOKE BUT COULD not at first remember what had happened. His head was aching, his arms and legs were numb, and his back and his seat were full of dents. After several futile efforts he managed to sit up.

He was on a pile of straw in the corner of a cabin built of logs with holes in the roof through which the sun was shining. The door was open and through it he could see his car with canary-colored license plates lettered "California."

He groaned and shook his head, but he only shook it once because a cannon ball was rolling round inside it, so he held it in his hands and tried to think. He had had a drink or two with a young man at a bar but after that everything was blank. He looked around the cabin. Tipped against the wall was something bright and shiny which resembled—a machine gun. *A machine gun?* He caught his breath as memory flooded back. *Black Beard.* In a rash, misguided moment, abetted by those cocktails and sustained by human vanity, he had yielded to suggestion—had in fact embraced the error . . .

Well, he must put the matter straight at once and resume his own identity, whatever that might be. And he jumped up from the straw pile, oblivious to his creaking joints, and hurried through the door.

"*Señor*—" The young man was sitting on a log, engaged in painting something on the bottom of a carton. He rose quickly and came forward with a smile upon his face and a paint brush in his hand—a careless, graceful figure in riding

boots and breeches with a wicked-looking knife tucked in his belt. "You have slept well? You are, I hope, refreshed?"

Mr. Littlejohn replied appropriately, but his eyes strayed back to the canary-colored plates. The young man observed his glance with an expression of anxiety.

"*Señor*, in the interest of your safety, I have taken the liberty to exchange your license plates for some others which I had. I hope I have not acted with presumption."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. How could he, in the face of this friendly ministration, confess the ugly fact he was not a desperado? It simply wouldn't do. And he boldly resolved himself at once. Let events pursue their course. He had assumed the role of Black Beard—under certain circumstances of extenuating nature which were still a little hazy in his mind, but let that be—he had assumed the role and—*he would play the part.* The thick, grim file which the guardians of the law had closed with such finality, might once again be opened. He felt a thrill of pleasurable excitement.

"Not at all," he declared. "On the contrary, *señor*, I greatly appreciate your thoughtfulness and courtesy."

"*Señor*——"

"*Señor*——"

They bowed. The young man introduced himself. His name was Diego Hernando Cortez, and he was, he added lightly, a lineal descendant of the conqueror, but was commonly called Tony by his friends. Mr. Littlejohn gave his own name as Horatio and felt that in so doing he had someway re-established his integrity.

"Horsho," repeated Tony. He had not heard this name before, he said, and he spoke it over carefully to impress it on his mind. "And now, *señor*, while you are taking breakfast—" He spooned a plate of chili beans from a kettle which hung above the embers of a fire—"I will complete my sketch. And he picked up a shingle which served him as a palette and resumed his interrupted occupation.

Mr. Littlejohn sat down at a respectful distance and ate his beans with relish though the peppers were so hot they burned his tongue. He was curious about the picture but too polite to look, so turned his attention to the scenery which was just another welter of jagged mountain peaks descending to a desert.

"There," cried Tony, "it is finished." And he held up the picture which, to Mr. Littlejohn's amazement, faithfully depicted in the classical tradition a thrilling moment from the previous night. There were the cars parked against the curb and he himself looking through the window, a remarkable resemblance though his mustache was sky blue. The bandit with the gun had fallen on his face and crimson flame was spouting from the muzzle of his weapon. And there was Tony standing by the car with the sack beneath his arm and something like a football suspended in the air above his head.

"It is very good indeed," murmured Mr. Littlejohn, "but excuse me, what is that?" And he pointed to the football.

Tony laughed. "That, *señor*, is my hat." He took it off and stuck his finger through a ragged hole an inch above the brim. "The bullet trimmed my hair, and that is why I make this sketch, in honor of the Virgin. In Mexico we call it a *retablo*." And he explained that it was a custom in his country, when one recovered from a dangerous illness or narrowly escaped a violent death, to describe the circumstances in a picture and present it to a church. "To one's patron saint if possible," he said. "But my own is far away in Guadalupe."

"A pretty custom," nodded Mr. Littlejohn.

"Why so it is, *señor*. And if it does no good, at least it does no harm." He was thoughtful for a moment. "But *something* surely saves us else we should all be lost. And if it be not God and the Virgin and the saints—*then who*?"

"Who indeed?" assented Mr. Littlejohn.

"I am doubtful sometimes, *señor*, when I think about the things that happen in this world. But—" He shrugged and

spread his hands—"I do not grudge a little time and paint, for—who knows about these matters?"

"Very true, *señor*," Mr. Littlejohn agreed and was turning the subject in his mind when a plane came swooping toward them from behind a near-by hill. It was flying very low and right above the cabin it tipped up on one wing and circled round and round as if in search of something, and then flew off again. Tony watched it with a pucker in his brow.

But Mr. Littlejohn was deep in thought. God and the Virgin and the saints were just names for that *something* contained in every man which was desperately employed in unremitting efforts to save him from himself—to dispel his greed and fear, and disperse the many phantoms that followed in their steps—to arouse him to awareness of that eternal conscious life of which he was a part.

Yes, the church was sound enough when once you got its symbols straightened out and stopped looking for your answers in the sky. And a little time and paint was not a bad idea: to re-create pictorially the hazards of existence and look them in the face—to objectify experience was certainly a step in the complicated process of escaping from yourself. Painting a *retablo* was not nearly so silly as it sounded . . .

"*Señor*, I do not like this plane." Tony shook his head. "I do not think that he could see your mustache, but——"

"My mustache?" Mr. Littlejohn was startled. "But, *señor*, my file is closed and I am legally dead." Which was true, he reflected, no matter who he was.

"You have the lion heart, *señor*. Still, I think that we must go."

"No, no," protested Mr. Littlejohn. He had not the lion heart, quite the contrary in fact.

But Tony was not to be persuaded. "You may risk your life, *señor*, as often as you like, but you may not do so while you are my guest."

Mr. Littlejohn could not repress a groan. He was weary of

his travels and the thought of dashing off to escape from imaginary perils was painful and depressing. "And if I were not Black Beard?" he exclaimed with sudden rashness.

Tony smiled reproachfully. "*Señor*, you love a joke and so do I. But this is not the time to jest."

"I assure you—" Mr. Littlejohn began.

"*Señor*—" There was an edge upon his voice—"*you are Black Beard.* And if I thought that you were not—" His hand played with the knife hilt in his belt—"then I would cut your heart out."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. He liked this gay young man who, if you were his friend, would protect you with his life, and if not—would as cheerfully cut your heart out. It was simple and direct as human matters should be. "Why then, *señor*," he smiled, "by all means let us go."

They buried the machine gun in the straw inside the cabin and, with the *retablo* reposing on the back seat where the paint would dry, were under way in no time. The sun was warm, the air as clear as crystal, and Tony chatted lightly. The cabin they had left was not his home, he said, but an abandoned cow shed which he had stumbled on one time when hard pressed by the law. He had no home nor any human tie, and the sum of his possessions were the clothes upon his back and the weapons in his belt.

"Have you always been a bandit?" inquired Mr. Littlejohn.

"Always, *señor*?" He pondered for a moment. "Perhaps I have. It has been, I suppose, a tradition in my family since the days of my ancestor, Hernando. But—" He laughed softly to himself—"in this modern world it is difficult to say who are bandits and who aren't. So, with your permission, *señor*, I will gladly tell you something of my life, and you shall be the judge."

"Please do," urged Mr. Littlejohn.

The young man lit a cigarette. He had been born to wealth, he said, on a great hacienda in Chihuahua, an estate which, in its

period of glory, was more than a hundred miles in length, and where many generations of his family, for a period of near four hundred years, had lived and died like kings.

There had been a portrait gallery in his home where they had hung upon the walls in a dim and somber light, with ruffs about their necks and rapiers at their sides. And among them had been many kinds of faces: smiling and grave, thoughtful and dull, kindly and cruel—as one would likely find in the past of any family. They were not all of one sort, having counted in the list several bishops and a cardinal, but the blood of Cortez was in their veins and they had ruled with iron hands, whether in the interest of God or of the devil, exploiting the labor of the Indian slaves to the utmost it would yield, and squandering princely revenues to embellish a cathedral or to bedeck a lady in Paris or Madrid. "And so, *señor*," he said, "they *were* bandits I presume, within the proper meaning of the word."

But the sins of one's forebears were not to be evaded and banditry in time begat its kind. There came bloody insurrections of the peons, ruthlessly suppressed. But these matters were expensive; revenues declined and great areas were mortgaged to carry on a war against . . . He hesitated with a smile upon his lips. "Against these *bandits*, *señor*, for so they were described, and so, no doubt, they were." But all this had its inception long before his time, and though the great demesne had been mortgaged and impoverished and had shrunk to half its size, yet even in his childhood, a *vaquero* on a horse could not ride from end to end in several days.

He spoke now of his father—a gentle, futile man, sorrowful but proud, the inheritor of monstrous debts and endless altercations which cast their tangled shadows on his house. And of his mother—a fair and fragile lady, a native of Madrid, of noble birth, deeply religious, who had come to her marriage from a convent and had never made adjustment to the wild and lonely life into which she had been thrust. He remem-

bered her most clearly kneeling in the chapel at her prayers—the frightened look that rarely left her eyes and the hint of tears behind them. She had borne two daughters, Maria and Teresa, and then a son, himself. The event had been occasion for rejoicing; the chapel bells had rung all through the night, and a great fiesta had been held to which the peons came from miles around.

When he was a child of six, his mother died—"just faded like a flower, *señor*, in a climate to which it was not born"—and was buried in the chapel beneath the stone-paved floor on which she had kneeled away her life. He remembered that as if it had been yesterday—the coffin with the candles, the priests before the altar, the relatives who came from far away, from the capital itself—and his mother's face with that little frightened look, as if it had been carved in wax.

And so he grew to youth. There was no school but tutors were obtained from Spain and England—that was why he spoke his English as readily as he did. The days and years went by. Maria, the eldest, was the mistress of the house, carried the keys, gave orders to the servants, received infrequent guests from neighboring haciendas. She was serious and silent, and religious like her mother; she wished to be a nun. But Teresa was quite different—a pretty little thing who loved to sing and dance, and cared only to be gay. And with her he spent much time not given to his studies. They fished and hunted, broke wild horses in corrals, galloped on the plains, or rode high in the sierra—being watchful for the bandits who were never far away and were always making raids upon the cattle. These were very happy days, for though the shadows lengthened and, more and more, his father sat alone among the papers in his study, involved in endless, futile calculations, still, to a boy, one day seemed like another and no nearer to the end.

But the end was inexorably approaching, for, driven to despair by the constant depredations—fences torn down, grain

period of glory, was more than a hundred miles in length, and where many generations of his family, for a period of near four hundred years, had lived and died like kings.

There had been a portrait gallery in his home where they had hung upon the walls in a dim and somber light, with ruffs about their necks and rapiers at their sides. And among them had been many kinds of faces: smiling and grave, thoughtful and dull, kindly and cruel—as one would likely find in the past of any family. They were not all of one sort, having counted in the list several bishops and a cardinal, but the blood of Cortez was in their veins and they had ruled with iron hands, whether in the interest of God or of the devil, exploiting the labor of the Indian slaves to the utmost it would yield, and squandering princely revenues to embellish a cathedral or to bedeck a lady in Paris or Madrid. "And so, *señor*," he said, "they *were* bandits I presume, within the proper meaning of the word."

But the sins of one's forebears were not to be evaded and banditry in time begat its kind. There came bloody insurrections of the peons, ruthlessly suppressed. But these matters were expensive; revenues declined and great areas were mortgaged to carry on a war against . . . He hesitated with a smile upon his lips. "Against these *bandits*, *señor*, for so they were described, and so, no doubt, they were." But all this had its inception long before his time, and though the great demesne had been mortgaged and impoverished and had shrunk to half its size, yet even in his childhood, a *vaquero* on a horse could not ride from end to end in several days.

He spoke now of his father—a gentle, futile man, sorrowful but proud, the inheritor of monstrous debts and endless altercations which cast their tangled shadows on his house. And of his mother—a fair and fragile lady, a native of Madrid, of noble birth, deeply religious, who had come to her marriage from a convent and had never made adjustment to the wild and lonely life into which she had been thrust. He remem-

bered her most clearly kneeling in the chapel at her prayers—the frightened look that rarely left her eyes and the hint of tears behind them. She had borne two daughters, Maria and Teresa, and then a son, himself. The event had been occasion for rejoicing; the chapel bells had rung all through the night, and a great fiesta had been held to which the peons came from miles around.

When he was a child of six, his mother died—"just faded like a flower, *señor*, in a climate to which it was not born"—and was buried in the chapel beneath the stone-paved floor on which she had kneeled away her life. He remembered that as if it had been yesterday—the coffin with the candles, the priests before the altar, the relatives who came from far away, from the capital itself—and his mother's face with that little frightened look, as if it had been carved in wax.

And so he grew to youth. There was no school but tutors were obtained from Spain and England—that was why he spoke his English as readily as he did. The days and years went by. Maria, the eldest, was the mistress of the house, carried the keys, gave orders to the servants, received infrequent guests from neighboring haciendas. She was serious and silent, and religious like her mother; she wished to be a nun. But Teresa was quite different—a pretty little thing who loved to sing and dance, and cared only to be gay. And with her he spent much time not given to his studies. They fished and hunted, broke wild horses in corrals, galloped on the plains, or rode high in the sierra—being watchful for the bandits who were never far away and were always making raids upon the cattle. These were very happy days, for though the shadows lengthened and, more and more, his father sat alone among the papers in his study, involved in endless, futile calculations, still, to a boy, one day seemed like another and no nearer to the end.

But the end was inexorably approaching, for, driven to despair by the constant depredations—fences torn down, grain

fields fired in the night, cattle spirited away, affairs in which he knew his own peons played a part or at least, through fear or sympathy, were blind and deaf when they were going on—his father had embarked upon that last resource of desperate men: of paying for protection. And to such a course there was not any end except destruction, for blackmail, by its nature, became more and more rapacious and might be counted on to slay the goose that laid the golden eggs and thus, in proper time, consume itself.

And now the bandits had a quasi-legalized existence, for, if one stooped to barter with a bandit, one became in fact a party to his deeds. They no longer skulked among the trees, confining their thieving to the night, but rode boldly, sometimes a hundred strong, into the very courtyard, and strode through the door as if they had the right. And they would sit across the table from his father with a list of their demands—so many hundredweight of hay or grain, so many beeves or sheep, or *pesos*, as the case might be—and when they went, they took what they had asked, for the asking was no more than a formality. "It was always for a *cause*, *señor*—that thin veneer of banditry. 'Land for the peasants' or some high-sounding phrase designed to catch the ragged peon's fancy."

Thus things went on while he grew to be a man, but he did not grieve about it, for indeed he could remember nothing else. And though numbers of the peons ran away to join one group of bandits or another, leaving fallow fields and fences unrepaired, and though Maria spent more time upon her knees and Teresa went unmarried for lack of proper dowry and his father's face was longer and more sorrowful than ever, still, if one did not look inside the big account book in the study, life appeared to be unchanged.

And then one evening as they sat at supper with candles in the massive candelabras and the treasured silver plate with the crest of Cortez embossed upon it, there had been a com-

motion in the courtyard—the ring of horses' hooves upon the flags, and shouts and clatter of many men with arms. And one had stamped his way into the room, brushing the old steward from the door—an ugly, thickset man of Indian blood with pock-marked face and a deep scar on his cheek—a man they had not seen before but one whose prowess had been gaining and whose visit was not wholly unexpected.

He had stood beside the table without any form of greeting or the courtesy of taking off his hat. His cause, he said, was freedom—the deliverance of his country from tyrants and oppression, and to achieve this purpose he required at the moment the modest sum of fifty thousand *pesos.* And when he was informed that his demand could not be met since no such sum of money was available, he had banged upon the table with his fist. "*Señor* Cortez," he said, "you will come with me as hostage, and if in ten days' time the money is not paid, you will answer with your life."

And so his father had been taken from them, silent and unprotesting, for what protest would avail. And lest he lack the service to which he was accustomed, they had raked the silver plate into a sack and carried it away and the candelabras too, with much rough and hearty laughter at their joke. He paused to light a cigarette and spoke softly through the smoke. "All in the noble cause of *freedom, señor.*"

There had been nothing left to do but in some way raise the ransom, not a great sum to be sure but still a heavy item for a family whose affairs were nearly bankrupt. And leaving Teresa with friends at a neighboring hacienda, he had gone with Maria to the capital to see what could be done—an inexperienced youth and a brokenhearted woman who wished to be a nun.

Relatives received them with open arms and tears but had little else to offer, and soon they were closeted with bankers and lawyers in a maze of maps and figures and imposing-looking documents which they could not understand. It ap-

peared that there were loans on which nothing had been paid since the days of Maximilian, and the bankers shrugged their shoulders while the lawyers made their arguments. Day after day went by and nothing was accomplished until at last, frantic with despair, they said that they would sign anything at all if only they might have the money now—before it was too late. And they had signed such papers as were put before them. He was silent for a moment. "I knew nothing of business and poor Maria knew no more than I, but I felt, deep in my heart—and I was right, *señor*—that now, in very truth, we had fallen among bandits."

The money had been paid at the appointed time and his father had come home, without the candelabras or the plate, but with a new expression in his eyes. His captivity had roused him to a sense of degradation and the blood of Cortez took fire in his veins. And when he learned the price that the bankers and the lawyers had exacted for his safety, his passion flamed again and he cursed them all for thieves. He would temporize no longer, he had stormed, with cutthroats in the country or the capital, would pay no more extortions to bandits or to bankers, but, commending his affairs to God, would alone defend his honor and the land which was his heritage.

It was a bold resolve but it had come too late, and must have been too late no matter when it came, for the star of Cortez had long since passed its zenith and was now descending swiftly to oblivion, and its flight could not be stayed. Power in the world was changing hands—one group of bandits would replace another, and to oppose events was merely to take arms against one's fate. But he had not seen this clearly at the time and his youthful spirit seconded his father. Teresa, too, approved; but Maria wept and prayed for days on end and finally went away into a distant convent where she became a nun.

They had made such preparations as they could—arming

those peons whose loyalty they thought that they could trust, and converting the house into a fortress. Windows were barred and shuttered, furniture arranged for barricades, and water and provisions stored against a siege. And a sentry stood all day in the belfry of the chapel watching for the dust cloud which would warn of an attack. The heavy gates were closed at dusk and armed men slept at night on the flagstones of the courtyard.

And though he had not thought about it then, it had afterwards seemed likely that his father's mind was touched by his disasters—that he was now, in fact, a little mad, for he gave no more attention to his cattle or his fields but would spend the livelong day, with the old sword of Hernando strapped about his waist, marching his ragged army up and down. And in the evening he would sit for hours poring over maps or studying the campaigns of Caesar and Napoleon. It appeared from things he said that he intended to revive the ancient glory of his name and to reclaim his empire, bringing peace and plenty once more to the land, and freedom too, or what to him seemed freedom. The young man paused again. "It is curious, *señor*, but this freedom all men seek and emblaze upon their banners, is apparently a thing which only may be had at someone's else expense."

Some months went by without alarm, and, though they had news of raids on neighboring haciendas, their own was undisturbed, and it seemed that their defiance was respected. The rains had come and grain was sprouting in the fields when one evening, as the sun was setting, the tocsin in the belfry rang out its call to arms.

Wild excitement followed with much running here and there, and shouted orders which no one understood, or, if they did, obeyed; and so great was the confusion that he could not afterwards be sure of the sequence of events. But of half a hundred peons who had been armed and drilled, scarce a dozen responded to the call, and these stood trembling in the

courtyard, giving less thought to their guns than to their prayers. The gates were closed and barred, and torches lighted in the sconces on the walls for it was growing dark, and then he had thought about his sister and had run back into the house, passing by his father at the door. And he remembered very well the look upon his father's face—"A frail, fine face, *señor*, with madness in its eyes, but a proud and happy madness for which one need feel no shame."

He had left him standing there upon the step before the door with the sword of Hernando at his belt, and, going on into the house, had encountered Teresa on the stairs. He ordered her back to her room, but she begged to stay with him and had fought against his will, clinging to the stair rail until he broke her grasp and carried her, struggling in his arms, back up the stairs into her room where he thought she might be safe if there were safety anywhere. And he had locked the door against her, and left her beating with her fists upon the panels and crying out to him.

And then he had run back to the courtyard, and the picture that now met his gaze was his most vivid memory of that night. The gates were open—the frightened peons had unbarred them at the first command and were huddled on their knees in a corner of the yard against the house—and the far end of the yard was filled with men, spread out against the wall and wedged tightly in the entrance, lighted dimly by a lantern which hung within the arch. The pock-marked leader with the scar upon his face had dismounted from his horse and stood a pace or two before the arch with a pistol in his hand. It was as if, crowding through the gateway, they had suddenly been turned to stone, some with guns already at their shoulders and others with the barrels pointed down or held across their breasts. And there was not any sound—no more than if one had been looking at a painting.

His father was standing in the center of the courtyard, his hair like silver in the torchlight, facing toward and a dozen

paces distant from the bandits, with the point of his rapier resting on the pavement and his hands clasped together on the hilt. At length he drew one hand away and seemed to cross himself, and then he raised his sword until the blade was level with his eyes, and holding it thus in position of attack, he advanced upon the enemy with a firm and measured step: two paces—three and four and five, and still there was no sound or movement in the crowd. The leader drew back against his men. "Fire," he cried, discharging his pistol as he spoke, but he spoke the word three times and the point of the rapier was almost at his throat before the volley came. "And so my father died, *señor*, riddled with bandit bullets, the descendant of a long, illustrious line of bandits, and himself perhaps a bandit, but certainly a gentleman."

Yet he could not say that he had seen him fall, for he had himself been hit—a glancing blow which rendered him unconscious—and left for dead. When he regained his senses there was no one in the courtyard save his father who lay where he had fallen, and the huddle of dead peons in the corner of the wall, murdered as a warning to their fellows. The bandits had not stopped to pillage, but, tearing down the torches from the sconces, had set fire to the house and gone quickly on their way. And the wing which held his sister's room, whose door he had locked with his own hand and whose windows were barred against escape, was now a seething furnace.

"Dear God—" breathed Mr. Littlejohn trembling with emotion.

"*Si, señor*—" The young man nodded slowly. "It was a bitter thing and for a time I did not wish to live. But—" He smiled and shrugged—"grief like joy, dies quickly if it be not cultivated."

When all was said and done, there had been something left: a half-burned house, buildings and granaries emptied of their contents, some cattle overlooked or strayed away, and, when

the lawyers and the bankers had been satisfied, a remnant of the land—an eighth of what it had been in his boyhood, which though pitiful by contrast, yet remained a fine estate.

So, taking heart that the worst had now occurred and the follies of his forebears had been finally liquidated, he began to rebuild his shattered fortunes. The bandits came no more, the peons went about their tasks in peace, the grain came back into the fields, the cattle multiplied, and things were not going badly when suddenly one day . . . He laughed, his shoulders shaking at the memory. "The government, *señor*, turning bandit overnight, decreed expropriation of my property."

"Good heavens!" Mr. Littlejohn exclaimed.

"Not mine alone," the young man hastened to explain, "but all the great estates in Mexico, leaving to each a paltry bit of ground on which no predatory landlord could possibly survive. Land for the peasants, *señor*—a fine, mouth-filling phrase which bandits of political persuasion rarely overlook."

And so the land of Cortez went back to the Indians from whom it had been stolen in the first place, and who were now free to plunder one another as—according to reports of Bernal Diaz and other historians of the period—as they had done in the days of Montezuma before the conqueror introduced more effective forms of banditry, endorsed and consecrated by the church.

Accepting what could not be avoided, he had turned his back upon the home he loved and set out for the capital which he found in turmoil: "freedom" the password of the moment and every major crime committed in its name—the city filled with refugees, ex-landlords like himself—sad-eyed, futile, and confused, inheritors of power which they could no longer wield and without which they were empty of all function. "For it is thus with men who rule," he said, "they can neither toil nor spin and, deprived of their authority, are helpless."

He had walked the streets for weeks and his purse was almost empty when at last he found employment as the driver of a cab. And because he could speak English he was often in demand by the tourists from the States who gave him liberal tips and named him Tony. He would drive them here and there about the town, reciting the patter he had learned, and sometimes out into the country—to the Xochimilco gardens or the ancient pyramids—or perhaps to Guadalupe where, in the great cathedral, his miraculous Virgin—the same for whom he had painted the *retablo*—had her shrine. And he would never fail to light a candle at her altar and to offer up a prayer—a prayer which was finally to be answered. He paused and was silent for a moment.

"It was a warm and pleasant day, *señor,* and I was dozing in my cab outside the Ritz Hotel when there came out of the bar a man in a general's uniform—a man with pock-marked face and a scar upon his cheek."

Mr. Littlejohn started and exclaimed beneath his breath.

"*Si, señor.* This had been my prayer and for this I had been waiting through many weary months." He paused again and the smile upon his lips was thin and tight. "He got into my cab, giving me an address in the suburbs, and so we rode together through the streets, but I did not speak or turn my head until we had arrived. And then I jumped down from my seat and held the door for him and took the money which he put into my hand. 'You are so and so, *señor*?' I said, calling him by name, for I did not wish to make a blunder. He acknowledged it and added, 'But I do not know you, *señor.*' 'Yes,' I said, 'you do. I am Cortez.' And I drew this knife out of my belt—" He withdrew it as he spoke.

"My father's sword was broken when he fell, and the end of the blade I had made into this dagger." He slipped it back into the sheath. "The bandit's ugly face turned pale; he called for help and tried to draw his pistol, but I drove the knife

into his throat. The rapier of Hernando found the mark at which my father aimed it."

"Gracious heavens—" murmured Mr. Littlejohn.

"And so, *señor*," the pleasant voice went on, "whatever I had been before, and of which you must be judge, I was now, *in fact*, a bandit with a price upon my head—and a bandit with no *cause*, neither 'liberty,' 'equality,' nor any other catch phrase to assure me of popular support—and so I ran away out of my country."

Mr. Littlejohn sighed deeply. "You have had a very tragic life, *señor*."

"Tragic?" He lit another cigarette. "Why, yes, *señor*, I suppose it has been that, and perhaps I should not say I have enjoyed it. But—" He smiled and spread his hands—"the truth is that I have."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. They presently came out into a broad and busy highway but so deep was he in thought, he did not notice where they were. Hildegarde and Henry, Luli and the blind man, and now this gay and youthful bandit whose misfortunes rode so lightly on his shoulders—who looked back without regret and forward without fear, and who had, in spite of everything, *enjoyed it*. Grief, like joy, died quickly if you did not cultivate it. That's what he had said. And there were those who chose to water weeds and let the flowers wither . . .

They had come by different roads, those five, but had come to the same end—had found the missing fragment of the puzzle. For them the picture was complete. They could not describe it but they *lived it*. And just what was it that they did? What? What? Some attitude toward life—some relationship with living—with the eternal moment. Yes, but *what*? He sighed and shook his head. He had missed it by a hair.

The young man turned his head. "And you, *señor*," he said, "have you always been a bandit?"

"A bandit? I?" Mr. Littlejohn was momentarily confused,

and then he said, "Why, yes, *señor*, I think perhaps I have." And thinking of the Commodore, that stern and predatory parent, he added with a smile, "As in your case, *señor*, it has been, I believe, a tradition in my family."

"And do you have a *cause, señor*?"

"A cause? Well, no—" Mr. Littlejohn said doubtfully.

"*Bueno!* Then we are of one mind." He pulled up at an intersection, pointing with his hand. "To the right lies Hollywood, to the left is—Mexico. It is for you to say, *señor*." But as he named his homeland there was longing in his voice and nostalgia in his eyes.

"To Mexico," cried Mr. Littlejohn without a moment's hesitation.

"Ah, *señor*, again we have one mind." And as he took the left-hand road he said half to himself, "It is talking of a thing that brings it back—little things deep buried in the memory: the color of the sky, a book I left upon the shelf, the odor of a flower. It will be good to see my home again. A fine, bold country, *señor*, and—who knows what we shall find?"

"Who indeed?" echoed Mr. Littlejohn and felt his pulses tingle to the whisper of adventure. And presently he fell into a daydream: he wished, and wishing, saw himself and his new friend mounted side by side on noble steeds, with burnished helmets on their heads and swords of good Toledo steel, cutting their way through multitudes of bandits—beheading them with careless, graceful gestures—cutting back through time itself into the past—the past of ruffs and rapiers—of romance and of candlelight . . .

XIV

TRAFFIC HAD THINNED AND shadows were creeping up the mountains when they came upon a little white-walled church with a gold cross on its steeple. It stood alone some distance from the road like a lighthouse in the sea.

Tony stopped the car and regarded the church with an air of calculation. It was not much, he said, still it *was* a house of God, and, despite its mean proportions, must be qualified to serve as custodian of *retablos*. Mr. Littlejohn agreed and, leaving Pickles in the car, they walked a hundred yards across the desert and went into the church.

It was a bare and humble place of worship with whitewashed walls and rough, unvarnished pews, and an unassuming altar with some lighted candles on it. And there was no one in it. Tony dipped his fingers in the holy water fount and crossed himself.

"Hello—" he shouted lustily, but there was no response.

"Perhaps we might just leave it on the altar," Mr. Littlejohn suggested in a whisper. But Tony shook his head. The *retablo* must be confided to a priest who would notify the Virgin that it had been received and call her attention to the donor. Otherwise the thing would have no purpose, for the Virgin, he observed, was no doubt extremely busy and could not be expected to entertain petitions unless properly presented through her vicars.

And he called again, "Hello—" But still there was no answer and Mr. Littlejohn remarked that there was certainly nobody

on the premises. Tony laughed. "*Señor*," he said, "where there is a church there is a priest, for the two are joined together like a husband and a wife." And he strode down the aisle and tried a door which yielded to his hand and gave access to a shed which seemed to be the sacristy.

And there, in very truth, there was a priest: a young man in a soutane, with heavy shell-rimmed glasses, sitting on a stool with a sandwich in his hand and some others in a paper bag, and a thermos bottle on the floor within convenient reach. He did not seem pleased to see them.

"I am busy," he said briefly in a mellow Dublin accent.

"Why, *señor* padre, so I see—" Tony smiled amusedly. "But unfortunately my business will admit of no delay, and since this is a house of God, and since you are His vicar——"

The priest stood up, brushing crumbs off of his gown. God's vicars, he said glumly, had bellies like the rest, and little time to fill them or much to fill them with. And he patted his own which stuck out like a melon.

"As to that," said Tony dryly, "it would seem you had done well, or perhaps—you are with child."

But God's vicar was not in jesting mood. "What the devil do you want?" he snapped.

"*Señor* padre," Tony laughed, "you have brought the whole matter to a head and I will not long detain you from your labors. I have here a *retablo*—" And he held it up to view.

"A what?"

"A *retablo, señor*. Not a work, I admit of Orozco or Rivera whose proletarian daubing, if it be not someway checked, will soon cover and deface every wall in Mexico, but a painting from my hand which, though crude in color and design, yet follows the tradition of the masters."

"Humph!" said the priest and sat down upon his stool. "Well, whatever it may be, I do not want it."

"Want it?" Tony stared.

"I wouldn't give a dime for it."

"Excuse me, please—you said?"

"A dime," the priest repeated but with somewhat less conviction.

"I see. You think that I—" His voice was edged and Mr. Littlejohn began to feel uncomfortable. "You think I wish to sell you my *retablo*?" The priest stood up again. "You have not heard of a *retablo*, eh?"

"No, I—I have not."

"Nor perhaps of the Virgin, *señor* padre?" Yes, he had heard of her, the priest admitted hastily. "The one in Guadalupe?"

"Well—no—" He really couldn't say he had, and he mumbled that, having but recently arrived from Ireland by way of Cincinnati, he had not yet made acquaintance with the virgins of this country.

"So?" Tony smiled but his smile was very thin. On the point of Irish virgins he would not commit himself though he had been unaware that there were any such and was not now otherwise convinced. "However," he went on, "we digress from the subject which concerns Guadalupe and the Virgin of that place, of whom, if I have not misunderstood your words—" His hand found the knife hilt in his belt—"of whom you have not heard, *señor*?"

"I—I'm very sorry——"

"So? You are sorry? But you call this house a church and yourself a priest of God?" The priest said nothing; he had turned quite pale by now. "It is to this that things have come." He appealed to Mr. Littlejohn more in sorrow than in anger. "To this—to this—" And he turned back to the priest who had begun to tremble, and said between his teeth, "Sit you down, *señor* padre, on your stool while I relate to you the legend of the Guadalupe Virgin, and give you some instruction in certain other matters pertaining to the duties of a priest."

"But—I——"

"*Sit down, I said!*" The priest sat down in haste. "And if you do not listen to me carefully—" His fingers played upon the knife—"then you will never eat another sandwich, *señor* padre, for, as surely as you sit there, you will have no place to put it."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn, and commenting to himself that the classical technique of conversion was still undeniably effective, he strolled back into the church and sat down in a pew. There was a newspaper lying on the seat, discarded no doubt by a parishioner—a Los Angeles morning paper with the date line of that day. And as he glanced at it, the remnant of his hair stood up on end—not with terror but excitement.

"BLACK BEARD IN LAS VEGAS"—column after column and pages filled with pictures. The light was dim, the paper crinkled in his shaking hands, the letters swam before his eyes . . .

—had suddenly appeared with his bristling black mustache and no effort at disguise . . . mingling with the patrons of the Palace, a saloon and gaming house . . . had the ultimate audacity to approach a roulette table . . . a twenty-dollar note which was *yellow* and not green . . .

Mr. Littlejohn slipped off the seat but recovered his position in a flash. The scene came back, every detail resurrected. But the twenty-dollar note? Well, of course he must have had it in his pocket. And then he remembered that in 1929, when it looked as though anything might happen, he had put some yellow bills in the wall safe in his room, and had afterwards forgotten all about it. He held the paper to the light.

—as in the case of the Arizona butcher, the outlaw had flaunted the evidence of guilt . . .

"Butcher?" muttered Mr. Littlejohn. "Arizona butcher?" Had he given one to him when he paid him for the hamburger? Again he saw the butcher's face. "Great heavens!" Then it was for him they had been looking—for *him*, Horatio Littlejohn—G men scouring the mountains and the desert. And

but for Uncle Ben, that wily, kindly spirit who had flagged them off the road and hidden them away . . . "Dear me—" He gulped and read.

—while three confederates robbed the cashier's cage and made away with eighteen thousand dollars . . .

"Eighteen thousand dollars." And that was in the sack which the rat-faced men had taken. He was trying to read and to think at the same time, and the whole effect was terribly confusing.

—had strolled calmly through the door and stepped into his car—a dark-colored sedan of fairly recent model, bearing New York license plates 327-429 . . .

He gurgled with relief, and the picture in his eye of canary-colored plates lettered "California." And he skimmed a dozen paragraphs which ascribed the shooting on the sidewalk to a war between two rival gangs of bandits.

—two of the desperados had been captured . . . all of the loot had been recovered . . . J. Edgar Hoover and his staff left Washington by plane at 2:00 A.M. but declined to make a statement to the press . . . definitely established that the bandit car had been driven north or east . . .

"Pooh-pooh!" said Mr. Littlejohn. Nothing could be further from the truth. South and west was the route that they had come, and straight ahead—not a hundred miles away—was the fine, bold land of Mexico.

Tony came out of the sacristy. "*Señor* padre," he said sternly, speaking back into the shed, "I leave you to your prayers and meditations." He closed the door and displayed the thermos bottle and the paper bag of sandwiches. "For his ignorance and his sins I have given him a penance—for the balance of the day he is to fast." He sat down in the pew with a twinkle in his eye and held out the paper bag. "Some are chicken and some ham, and the red wine in this bottle is not bad."

Mr. Littlejohn smiled appreciation of the jest. "There are some, er, matters in this paper—" he said doubtfully.

"Paper?" Tony scanned it, nibbling at a sandwich. And then he laughed aloud. "Horsho! My friend! You fill my soul with joy. Those yellow bills! What fun it must have been to watch their faces!"

"Oh, er, yes—" Mr. Littlejohn assented and, joining in the laughter, albeit rather nervously, drank deeply from the thermos.

"What did you mean to do, *señor*?"

"To do, *señor*?" He strangled on the wine.

"But yes, your plan?—the purpose of the comedy?"

"Oh, yes, my plan! Well—I—you see—" He covered his confusion with a cough. "I had not quite decided——"

"Ha-ha!" Tony held his sides. "You will be the death of me——"

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn, and then began to chuckle. The matter gained in humor with the wine.

"But forgive me, *señor*, please—have you many more of them?"

"Many more, *señor*? Of what?"

"Of those famous yellow bills?"

"Dear me," said Mr. Littlejohn, "I had not thought to look." And he felt in his pocket which was empty. He had not any yellow bills nor any green ones either.

"But just last night, *señor*—in the car—upon the seat——"

"Why, yes—" And he suddenly remembered: when the rat-faced man had tried to pick his pocket, he had taken out his money and flung it on the seat—and there no doubt it was where he had left it. "You are quite correct, *señor*, but it seems that I forgot to pick it up."

Tony choked with mirth. "Horsho, my friend," he said, "everything you say and do brings you closer to my heart."

They finished up the wine with a fine exchange of compliments, and the sandwiches as well, reserving two for Pickles

—a chicken and a ham—and at this very moment Pickles barked—a bark of angry protest. And looking through the door they saw a black and white patrol car standing close beside their own, and two men in uniforms of state police alighting from it.

"Ha!" said Tony sharply. "This is not so good, *señor*."

Mr. Littlejohn felt that the fact was understated. There was no exit but the door and no cover in the desert if they dared to venture out, nor any place to hide except the sacristy which was already occupied. He looked back through the door. One of the men was fishing through the window of the car with a piece of rope or wire while Pickles snarled and yelped. The situation called for inspiration . . .

"I have it," he exclaimed, "or at least I think I have. If they thought that we were priests——"

"Priests, *señor*?"

"If we were dressed like priests, and—doing something at the altar——"

"Horsho! What a mind!" And without another word they darted for the sacristy.

The priest was still sitting on the stool with the *retablo* on his knees, and he looked up in alarm. "I—I have mentioned this matter to the Virgin, sir," he stammered.

"You have done well, *señor* padre," Tony said. "But now we need that long black dress you wear."

"My—my soutane——"

"The same. Be quick! There are those who come to Mass and we must not keep them waiting."

Mr. Littlejohn was going through a cupboard in the corner.

There was another soutane there, but very short indeed—for an altar boy perhaps, and in a drawer beneath was a surplice and a chasuble. He dragged them out in frantic haste while the priest looked on with horror in his eyes.

"But—but this is sacrilege—" he muttered.

"Sacrilege?" Tony started with his hand upon his knife. "Take care what you are saying."

"I—I'm very sorry, sir——"

"Sorry is a word that comes easily to your lips when fear is in your heart. But harken to me now: if there be sacrilege among us, it is that you, a priest of God, should go in ignorance of His works while you glut yourself with food and drink."

"Make haste," breathed Mr. Littlejohn.

"*Señor,* we fly." He turned back to the priest. "Quick now, strip off that gown before I slit it from your back." The gown came off in no time and Mr. Littlejohn got into it. It was snug and much too long.

"I can hold it up," he said, adjusting the surplice to his shoulders. "And now, I believe this thing comes next—" He slipped into the chasuble and flung a stole around his neck. His cap was in his pocket and his bald head glistened with benevolence. "Do I look all right?"

Tony shook with laughter. "You are marvelous, *señor.* But permit me to suggest that you keep your face turned down as if in prayer." He had got into his own gown and had found a lace collar for his neck, but the skirt was very short and the sleeves stopped at his elbows.

"If you stay upon your knees—" suggested Mr. Littlejohn.

"Why, yes, *señor,* I must remember that." And he turned to the priest who was standing with clasped hands and his eyes turned up to heaven, looking somewhat like a chicken freshly plucked. "And now, *señor* padre, you may retire to your cell." He pointed to the cupboard.

"In there?" The wretched man stared dumbly. "But—why?"

"Why?" thundered Tony. "Because the indiscretion of your speech requires further penance. Get in, and quickly!" The priest got in and sat upon the floor; there was just room for him. "You will repeat 'Hail Marys' until I come to let you out. And if you come out sooner—" He paused, tapping softly with his fingers on his knife—"why then, *señor* padre, I shall

surely cut your heart out." And he closed the cupboard door which had not any lock.

"I think we should proceed," Mr. Littlejohn said calmly.

"Go, *señor*. I follow in your steps." Tony grabbed an incense pot and swinging it before him, followed his companion through the door into the church.

Mr. Littlejohn walked slowly with his chin upon his breast. From the corner of his eye he saw the two policemen, wholesome-looking boys, coming down the aisle with pistols in their hands. He ascended the steps and stood before the altar, making suitable gestures with his hands and chanting in a solemn voice the only Latin phrase he could remember. "*E pluribus unum—e pluribus unum—e pluribus unum—*" He could hear the two boys whispering.

"Shh—" admonished Tony. There was silence for a moment and then one spoke aloud though with evident reluctance.

"Excuse us, father, but——"

"Hush!" said Tony sternly. "We are celebrating Mass."

"Sure, we know and we hate to bother you, but there's a car out there with stolen license plates. We thought you might've seen the guys that left it."

"*E pluribus unum—*" The chant gave thanks. So that was all: a car with stolen license plates—a bagatelle—a nothing.

"No." The incense pot swung steadily back and forth. "We have been occupied in prayer."

"It's Black Beard that we're looking for," the second voice spoke up.

"Black Beard?" The incense pot scraped against the floor. "But we have read in the paper that he is far away."

"That's what they thought," the first voice said. "But ever since daybreak they been picking up money off the highway, all the way from Las Vegas down to Barstow—green and yellow bills."

"Like a paper chase," the second voice put in.

"That's a fact." The first voice laughed. "Throwing his

money out the window of his car. I guess he's nuts all right."

"*E pluribus unum—e pluribus unum—*" Mr. Littlejohn went on without a tremor but beads of perspiration were gathering on his skull. So that's where it had gone—blown through the window in the night. Well, at least it wasn't out there in the car. He remembered another phrase which seemed slightly more appropriate. "*In vino veritas—in vino veritas*——"

The incense pot swung hopefully. "But Barstow is far from here, young man."

"It sure is," the boy agreed. "And we never thought of Black Beard when we seen them stolen plates. But when we looked inside the car—" he took something from his pocket—"we found this yellow bill tucked in behind the seat."

"*E vino pluribus—*" No, no, that wasn't right. "*In unum veritas—*" Cold sweat was trickling down his back. "*Pluritas—veribus—*" Confound the thing.

"So Black Beard's been here, father, and he can't be far away."

"Do you mind," said the second voice, "if we take a look around?"

"Not at all." The incense pot preserved its even swing. "But please remove your cap."

"Gee, I'm sorry, father——"

"*E pluribus unum—in vino veritas—*" At last he had them straightened out. But, good heavens, what a mess! In an hour at the most, all the G men in the country would be hot upon their trail. He heard the creaking door into the sacristy, and held his breath until he heard it shut. The road to Mexico . . .

"It's okay, father." They were moving up the aisle. "Sorry to have bothered you."

The second voice cut in, "We got the switch key to that heap and we'll send a tow car for it."

"*E plur—*" His voice died in his throat. The key! The key! Without it they were lost.

The incense pot stopped swinging. "If you care to leave the key with us, young man?"

"Yeah?" A pause while time stood still. "I guess we better keep it, father. Thanks all the same. Good night—" And they were gone.

"*In vino veritas*—" He heard the starter whir, the motor race, and Pickles barking wildly with a frantic, choking sound. The car backed up and turned around, its headlights stabbing through the dusk and lingering for an instant on the altar, and then dashed off toward Mexico. And Pickles' howls went with it, receding in the distance. His dog! They had snared the faithful beast and were taking him away. "My dog," he cried and started for the door, but tripped upon his trailing robe and sprawled upon the floor. "They have taken Pickles with them."

"Why, yes, *señor*, they have—" Tony shook with laughter—"and the switch key to our car, and already they are talking on the short wave radio ——"

"However that may be—" Mr. Littlejohn stood up with his soutane draped about him like a piece of modern sculpture. "However that may be, *I want my dog.*"

"Horsho! Forgive me, please—" He struggled to control his mirth. "You are wonderful—superb. We are cut off from escape, facing capture, death perhaps—and you think about your dog. It is beautiful—so beautiful—but also it is funny."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn and, feeling a bit giddy, sat down hastily on the step. The tempo and mutations of contemporary life, and—the red wine too no doubt . . . "A church," he mused aloud, "is a place of sanctuary, and while we remain here we are safe."

But Tony shook his head. They could not stay much longer with the priest there in the cupboard and parishioners coming in. And so to stay at all was merely to postpone an evil day.

The objection was sound. Mr. Littlejohn sighed heavily and then suddenly sprang up in great excitement. "Again I

think I have it," he exclaimed. "Since we may not remain, then the answer is obvious: we must take the church with us when we go."

"The church?—with us, *señor?*"

"I am speaking, *señor*, in a figurative sense, for the functions of the church extend far beyond its walls." He seized a lighted candle from the altar.

"Horsho!" Tony stared, admiration and horror mingling in his eyes.

"Precisely." Mr. Littlejohn's expression was triumphant. "Take up your incense pot and follow me, *señor*, for the church is going with us."

"But—that is sacrilege ——"

"Sacrilege?" Mr. Littlejohn reflected. "Why, no, *señor*. Sacrilege in fact is an attitude of mind, and if there be no irreverence in the thought there can be none in the act."

But Tony was not to be convinced. Already they had waded deep in sin and to tempt God's vengeance further would be nothing short of madness. "But wait!" he cried abruptly. "I have thought of something else." And he ran into the sacristy and presently returned with an air of satisfaction. "It is all arranged," he said.

"Arranged?"

"The priest has given us a penance."

"A penance?"

"Why, yes, *señor*—a penance for the sins we have committed in this church. We are to make a pilgrimage to the shrine at Guadalupe, and we may wear these clothes and also take the candle and the pot. He did not wish to do it, but—" He shrugged and touched his knife—"but it has been arranged."

Mr. Littlejohn nodded his approval but could not repress a smile. Ecclesiastical authority was comforting to have, no matter how obtained. He gathered up his skirt and pointed with the candle. "To Mexico, *señor*!"

"*Señor*—" They bowed and marched in single file out of the church.

The first stars were twinkling in the sky. There stood the car, emasculated, helpless. Mr. Littlejohn walked quickly by, his head devoutly bowed and the lighted candle in his outstretched hand.

Traffic was light but several people stopped and offered rides. Tony answered briefly. "We thank you kindly but we are doing penance for our sins." And the cars would drive away while the passengers stared back out of the windows.

They had walked about an hour, and Mr. Littlejohn was thinking with a sense of mild dismay that at this rate of speed it would take them several days to reach the border, when three motor cops roared past them going south. And close behind this escort came two black limousines with seven men in each and the glint of rifle barrels. They did not even hesitate and the penitents fled from their path just in time to save their lives.

Tony was annoyed. "Police or no police," he said, "they ought to be arrested for proceeding in this fashion on a public thoroughfare."

"Why so they should, *señor*," Mr. Littlejohn agreed. "Yet they typify the course of average human conduct which, in mad and frantic haste, either passes or runs over the very thing it seeks." And as he walked along he reflected to himself that in man hunts, as in other forms of hunting, something happened to the hunter—a confusion of himself with the quarry he pursued, so that, when the chase was in full cry, it was difficult to tell which was man and which was beast.

They came around a point of rock upon a service station and stopped dead in their tracks. Standing before the lunchroom door was a black and white patrol car. Was it the one that had visited the church? There was no way to tell.

"We had better make a detour," Mr. Littlejohn suggested.

"Impossible, *señor*, the road is hemmed with cactus. But

wait!" he added hopefully. "I will find out who they are and perhaps learn something of their plans." And stripping off his soutane, he left his companion squatting in the ditch and vanished in the darkness.

Mr. Littlejohn waited for what seemed an interminable time and became very chilly and uncomfortable. He was so close to the lunchroom he could hear the hum of voices and he thought he could detect the fragrant odor of hamburger and onions. At length when his impatience could no longer be restrained, he took off his flowing robe and hid it in a bush, fixed his cap upon his head which was tingling with the cold, and set out on hands and knees to investigate matters for himself.

It *was* hamburger and onions; there was no mistake about it. But the voices were coming from the radio in the car, and the car itself was running; he could hear the motor chugging. He was almost at the door, still he saw no sign of Tony and was beginning to feel anxious, when suddenly he heard a loud, familiar bark—an ecstatic yelp of joy. He turned and there was Pickles' woolly head projecting from the window of the car.

His dog! His heart leaped in his breast and, scrambling to his feet, without any thought of danger or any thought at all, he ran to the car and jerked the door open. Yes, there was Pickles, drooling with delight, tethered with a wire to the steering post. His dog! And then he heard a shout and, looking back, he saw the two policemen coming at full speed with pistols in their hands, and he jumped into the car and slammed the door. And the next thing he knew, Tony was beside him, the motor roared, the gears crashed into place, the car sprang forward . . .

"Your head, *señor*! Keep down your head!" Ping—Ping—Ping— Bullets splattered on the back, but Tony laughed disdainfully. "An armored car," he said, and added with emotion, "it must be that the Virgin has you in Her holy care, for

everything you do is miraculously done with the courage of a lion and the shrewdness of a cat." He swung the red light into place and opened up the siren. The speedometer said eighty miles an hour.

The radio kept chattering. "Calling car twelve," it said. "Car twelve—car twelve—car twelve ——"

"It is this one," Tony chuckled. And he briefly related what he had overheard, listening through a knothole in the wall. The cavalcade which passed them had been sent to block the border and all intersecting roads; there were other cars en route, and the highway behind him was already closed to passage.

Mr. Littlejohn was startled. "And—Mexico?" he asked.

"Ah, Mexico, *señor*—" Tony sighed. "We may not go that way tonight." And he went on to explain that there was a road a little farther on which turned off to the right and wound across the mountains to the coast. They should reach that intersection before their theft was known. "And then, *señor*—" He shrugged—"unless they block the other end before we can get through ——"

"Calling car twelve—car twelve—car twelve—car twelve ——"

"Perhaps we ought to answer it," Mr. Littlejohn said doubtfully.

"It can do no harm, *señor*." Tony pointed to the microphone which was hanging on the dash. "You must hold it to your lips and press the button in the handle."

Mr. Littlejohn complied with the directions. "Hello—" he said in a fair imitation of a youthful motor cop.

"Car twelve? Is that you, Ray?"

"Yeh."

"Your voice sounds funny."

"I gotta cold." He coughed.

"Yeah? Well, listen, Ray. Go back there to that church."

"Yeh."

"Some guy just phoned the sheriff's office he found a priest named Jeremiah Casey—you got that, Ray?"

"Yeh."

"He found this priest sitting in a closet and the guy won't come out or say a word except his prayers."

"Okay," said Mr. Littlejohn and hastily took his finger off the button. He was afraid that Tony's laughter might be heard.

"Hey, wait a minute, Ray! Car twelve—car twelve——"

But there were lights now in the road, and not lights of moving traffic. "The intersection," Tony said. "We turn here to the right." He flashed the warning light and pressed the siren button, and they took the curve at sixty miles an hour between two startled motor cops who dove out of their path.

"Car twelve—car twelve—car twelve—" There was a pause, then suddenly a tense and altered voice: "Calling all cars—calling all cars. Car twelve has been stolen by Black Beard and accomplice from Richfield service station on Highway 99, twenty-seven miles south of Coachella. Stolen car proceeded south. Go to nearest telephone and call headquarters for instructions." A pause. "Repeating. Calling all cars——"

Tony cut the switch. "They will tell us nothing more, *señor.* And now the race begins." He settled back, driving the rough and narrow road at breakneck speed with careless, sure hand. "We must make our way across before they have time to cut us off. In an hour more or less——"

"But—if they do?"

"Ah, if they do! Why then, *señor*—" He shrugged. "But look behind the seat and tell me what is there."

"Behind the seat?" Mr. Littlejohn explored with a flashlight that was hanging from the dash, and found, to his surprise, a shotgun and a rifle, a supply of ammunition, and a box of round, black objects.

"Tear gas bombs," said Tony, chuckling to himself. "We

have an armored car, and guns and gas—everything, *señor*, with which to start a war."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn, nodding thoughtfully in the dark. Yes, everything except a *cause*—a phrase, a banner, a device, without which war was seen to be what actually it was: a composite photograph of greed and fear. But however this might be, the race was on.

They fled through tumbling, barren hills and plunged into the mountains which rose on every side in black confusion. There was no traffic now, nor sign or sound of life except their own. The road wound like a corkscrew through interstellar space—as empty and remote; the headlights swung like meteors in the sky. The illuminated dials upon the dash were like hypnotic eyes . . .

Mr. Littlejohn was conscious of a strange sense of detachment, as if he were in fact both *observer* and *observed*. And this feeling grew upon him as he sat there in the dark with his eyes upon the clock face—as if he, while watching, were also being watched.

The inexorable hand crept steadily on its way, minute after minute. In an hour more or less . . . No, not an hour now, for already half of it had ticked away. Well, in half an hour then . . . A shiver slid along his spine. But although he felt the painful qualms of an actor on an opening night, he also felt pleasantly expectant—like a member of the audience—or like a critic sitting at his ease in a comfortable chair for which he had paid nothing, and with no obligation in the matter or hazard in its outcome, other than to notice and record what took place upon the stage.

It was really very curious. Here he was involved in a terrific situation, but still he could not feel that he was part of it. In half an hour now, or somewhat less . . . He shuddered at the thought and also smiled, and then was greatly startled by this conflict of reaction. He had shuddered with good reason, there was nothing strange in that; but *who was*

it that had smiled? Not Littlejohn nor Blackjohn, for they were being *smiled at*, but someone else entirely who was calmly looking on at the action of the play—amused, distressed, concerned, but definitely aloof from involvement in the drama—an *observer* who followed every nuance of the piece with unflagging zest and interest, who knew the lines so well that he sometimes called out cues when the actor was at fault . . .

The observer sitting out there in the darkened auditorium, like a playwright at rehearsal—unseen and seldom heard, but using every means at his command to protect his work from failure—*the observer was the author!*

Why, yes, of course! The still, small voice, the soul, the man himself—that reality of which the actor was a shadow. He had found him out at last—had even caught him smiling. And he said very softly, for the question was unanswered in his mind, "How can you smile in the face of what may presently befall me?" And then he waited in the dark with his eyes upon the clock, and distinctly heard the answer, like a voice by telephone with the phone inside himself. "Nothing can befall *ME*."

"Yes," said Mr. Littlejohn, "I see."

"*Señor*—" Tony pointed through the windshield to a black and jagged rim against the starlit sky—"there is the top, and beyond it at least a chance of safety, for there are many roads upon the other side, and good cover for the fox. Five minutes more and we shall be in time——"

Mr. Littlejohn said nothing, but he felt the icy trickle on his spine and was conscious of no reassuring smile. The spell was broken, the hidden voice was silent, the veil of illusion settling down into its place, the whole thing fading, slipping . . . The clock face on the dash. He moved uncomfortably. Had it been no more than that?—a wish fulfillment brought to life by some trick of self hypnosis? No. He shook his head. He *had heard* that still, small voice—no matter how.

"Ha!" Tony exclaimed and slowed the car. "I have seen a light, I think."

"A light?" Mr. Littlejohn sat up, alert and calm.

"Look close, *señor*—against the sky."

"The sky? Oh, yes!" He saw it now, in the saddle of the pass among the stars, but—it was red. "The tail light of a car——"

"Why, no, *señor*, because it does not move." He struck a match and lit a cigarette.

"Then what?"

"A lantern in the road."

"A lantern? Oh! Perhaps they are repairing it——"

"Perhaps, *señor*, but—how are we to know? There is a bridge, if I remember—a wooden bridge across the canyon. It may be damaged or washed out, but—if we stop to look—" He shrugged.

"No," Mr. Littlejohn said firmly, "we must not stop."

"Again you speak my thought, *señor*."

The red light waited for them, a friendly or malevolent eye: "Danger"—"Go slow"—or else a trap, men with guns and murder in their hearts, crouching in the dark beside the road . . .

"The windows—" Tony said. "It would be best to close them." They rolled them up. "It is comforting to know that my *retablo* has already been commended to the Virgin."

"Yes—" said Mr. Littlejohn. The light was very close and the moment was at hand.

"And now, *señor*, we go." The crimson spotlight of the car met the challenge of the lantern, the siren screamed defiance, the motor roared. Mr. Littlejohn closed his eyes and saw against the lids a man with frail, fine face and hair like silver in the torchlight, advancing step by step against his foes, with the long sword of Hernando held before him in position of attack . . .

"Halt! Halt!" The lantern flew to meet them, was gone

beneath the wheels. Bedlam of shouts, headlights flaming in their eyes—a moment of blinding, deafening chaos. Fusillade of guns, bullets rattling on the top, ripping through the glass. A tire blew; the car lurched crazily, found its wheels again, plunged on, lopsided, limping. Now they were on a wooden bridge, long and narrow like a trestle, loose planks thundering. The trap was sprung and they had passed, crippled but undaunted. And then . . .

He caught the remnant of his breath, clutched Pickles in his arms. The trap was not sprung yet; the bridge was blocked, a wagonload of hay across the end of it. No thoroughfare. Brakes howled; the skidding car turned halfway round and crashed into the railing which splintered and tore loose but served to fling it back. It whipped across the way, ripped the railing from the other side, balanced dizzily on two wheels and dove into the wagon which, with a creaking groan, collapsed upon the wreck in an avalanche of hay. The lights went out; there was a moment of dead silence.

"Horsho! Are you hurt?"

"Why, no—" said Mr. Littlejohn, "I don't believe I am."

"*Bueno!*" Tony reached behind the seat and stepped out of the car. "Set fire to the hay and I will hold them back. Be quick, *señor*!"

Mr. Littlejohn crawled out with Pickles in his arms. His knees were wobbly but he seemed to be intact. "The hay—the hay—" he muttered. "Set fire to the hay." Yes, yes, of course. And he had better hurry, for the shouting had resumed; motors were being started, headlights cut across the sky, and there were running footsteps on the bridge . . .

"Horsho! Be quick!"

"Yes, yes, I do—I am—" He knelt and struck a match but his hand was shaking so that it went out. He found and struck another. The hay was not too dry, caught fire slowly; and the shouting on the bridge was coming close. He blew

upon the flame. Plump! Something fell upon the bridge. Plump! Another and another. And then a strangled yell:

"Look out! It's gas. Get back!"

"Horsho! Does it burn?"

"Yes—now—" cried Mr. Littlejohn, fanning with his cap. The flame was spreading, smoke was pouring out . . .

"*Bueno!* These bandits do not catch us yet." Plump—plump—plump—like baseballs in a catcher's mitt.

A voice above the rest, furious and choking: "Goddamn it, get some light out here!" Medley of strangled curses and the rat-tat-tat of sub-machine guns raking wildly in the dark.

"Tony!" Mr. Littlejohn retreated blindly, half smothered in the smoke.

"*Si, señor,* I come, but first—" Plump—plump—plump. He laughed, and then a headlight caught him—a slender, graceful figure, his head thrown back, his shoulders shaking, the empty box beneath his arm, the last bomb broken on the planks. And now the volley came. He staggered, dropped upon one knee, the fine, gay laughter cut as with a knife. The smoke screen from the hay blacked out the scene, but it had come too late.

"Tony—" Mr. Littlejohn stumbled through the smoke and half dragged, half carried him around the wagon which blazed so fiercely now that, moments later, they could not have passed. Another lantern stood beyond it in the road and he sat down beside it with the curly head upon his lap. A shot had grazed the temple, one arm hung limp, but in the breast above the heart . . . "Ah, Tony! Tony—" The laughing eyes were open and they were laughing still.

"We do not go to Guadalupe, *señor*—" Mr. Littlejohn could not reply; a great lump filled his throat and his eyes were blind with tears. "My—*retablo*—" He spread his hands, smiling wanly with his lips. "But it was such a *little* church, and so—how can one tell?"

"Yes—" said Mr. Littlejohn. A dull explosion shook the

earth—the gas tank of the car—showers of sparks rose into the air. The bridge was burning now.

"Horsho—it is dark—" Mr. Littlejohn took the groping hand and held it tight in his. It was not dark; it was as light as day. A pause; the words came slowly, faintly. "It is hard to lose what one has loved——"

"Yes—" said Mr. Littlejohn, and then he heard his voice speaking to them both and knew it was the Author. "But no one can lose the thing he loves, for love is unity, and the lover and the loved cannot be separated."

"Ah—" Tony sighed. "What you have said is beautiful, and yet how can it be?—for I am dying, Horsho, and the thing that I have loved is life itself."

Mr. Littlejohn waited until the Author spoke. "You are not dying, for there is no such thing as death. And life cannot abandon you since you are part of it."

"Ah—" He struggled for his breath. "But—are you sure, Horsho?"

"Yes, *sure*," Mr. Littlejohn replied, and had never been so sure of any other thing.

"I see—" He smiled. "Thank you—*amigo*—" And in the twinkling of an eye he was gone into the waiting arms of Life. But the smile stayed there upon his face where the sculptor's hand had traced it in the clay.

The dog crouched back and raised a mournful howl. It was strange how he knew, or—*what* he knew. The clairvoyant eye perhaps . . . Mr. Littlejohn sat there in the road, thinking very hard, and repeating with his lips: "—the thing that I have loved is life itself."

Yes, love was somewhere in the scheme—a most perplexing point dating back to that day in the arena when he answered one question with another. "What do you mean by *love*? What does it *mean* to you? What does it make you feel or hear or see?" That's what he had said, and he had dodged the issue because he could not answer, and he could not answer now.

But love was in there somewhere. The Author had confirmed it without troubling to define it, and now the voice was silent. But *what was love*?—the actual meaning of the word?—a word so debased and so confusingly construed. And if you couldn't answer that, then how could you tell if you had got it? He sighed and shook his head, ignoring a phenomenon whose evidential character was at the moment simply overwhelming, while he tried with all his might, in true scientific fashion, to find a label for it. The door was wide, the light was streaming in, but the prisoner didn't know it.

The bridge collapsed and fell into the canyon with a terrific roar and spectacular display of pyrotechnics; the flames died down; the moon came creeping up the sky. And still he sat there in the road with the white face pillowed on his lap. Pickles whined and, sniffing at his pocket, gave tongue to hopeful barks. He roused out of his reverie.

"Patience, my friend," he said. "I have had your necessities in mind, but the tempo and mutations of contemporary life—" He got out the sandwiches—one chicken and one ham—and gave them to the dog.

Then very tenderly he put Tony's head down on the ground, closed the eyes and folded the hands upon the breast. And he tore a scrap of paper from the sandwich bag and wrote on it with a pencil:

> Diego Hernando Cortez, a descendant of the conqueror.
> To be buried in the chapel of his fathers.

And he put the paper into Tony's hand, folding the fingers tight upon it, and touched the cold, white forehead with his lips. And then he rose and walked away along the road.

And he was not alone and he was not afraid, but it never crossed his mind to wonder why.

XV

MR. LITTLEJOHN WALKED ALL NIGHT and found himself at dawn in a strange and pleasant land. The mountains were behind him, and gently billowing hills in their winter dress of green, stretched away into the west to meet the pale blue rim of the Pacific. The hills were crowned with orange groves and the scent of fragrant blossoms filled the air. It was really very lovely.

He was in a narrow lane hedged with eucalyptus trees and a high stone wall over which he could not see, but which, he reflected, must enclose a large estate. And he thought that, by following the wall, he must ultimately come upon the entrance and find someone from whom he could inquire his directions and possibly obtain a bite of breakfast.

Turning a corner of the wall he suddenly came out upon a little lake with pretty timbered banks. A highway brushed its farther end and curved away again, and already, though the sun had not yet risen, there was traffic whizzing by. Near by there was a rustic dock with a small skiff moored against it, and, sitting on the end of it, a man. A fisherman, he thought, and hurried down the bank. But the man was not fishing; he was just sitting there, in bathrobe and pajamas, looking down into the water.

"I beg your pardon—" ventured Mr. Littlejohn. The man looked up—a thin-faced man of doubtful age, with burning, restless eyes.

"I am praying," he said coldly and looked away again.

Mr. Littlejohn murmured his apologies and, retiring to a

respectful distance, sat down upon the stringpiece of the dock with Pickles curled beside him. An hour passed away. The sun came up, the water dimpled with the morning breeze, ripples splashed against the piling, insects buzzed and droned, traffic thundered faintly in the distance. He dozed and woke, and dozed and woke. At length the stranger turned his head.

"And now, sir—you were saying?"

"Why, er, really nothing of importance, but the fact is—I am lost."

"We are all lost," said the man and seemed to have finished with the subject.

"Yes, I know," smiled Mr. Littlejohn, "but I was speaking in a purely literal sense."

"Indeed?" He glanced up sharply and pointed with his hand. "There is Mount Palomar." Mr. Littlejohn looked in the direction indicated. "They are building a telescope up there with a reflecting mirror two hundred inches wide, but they will see no more than they do now which is exactly nothing." He paused and then went on as if talking to himself. "The stars are only lights hung up in the sky, designed for decoration, the farthest one perhaps ten miles away—" He looked at the sky with an air of calculation—"or possibly eleven." He turned on Mr. Littlejohn abruptly, almost fiercely. "What is a light? What is a mile?"

"Why really I——"

"Precisely. No one knows. Can you measure miles in gallons? Or minutes with a yardstick? Or a non-dimensional universe with a three-dimensional tape line? What is the weight of love?"

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. He wanted to discuss this item further but the stranger did not pause.

"It's all such bloody nonsense. Telescopes and microscopes designed to magnify a fundamental error. The answer is inside the human soul about which no one thinks or gives a tinker's damn."

"There is of course—the church—" suggested Mr. Littlejohn.

"The church, my eye!" He spat. "An empty glass, the dregs of ritual clinging to the bottom." He groaned and got upon his feet, a tall, gaunt figure with arms that flapped like wings. "The thing is all balled up. It has to be restated. And that's my job, and a lousy assignment if anyone should ask you."

"Yes, I should think so—" Mr. Littlejohn agreed.

"Should you indeed?" He laughed with a hollow, bitter sound. "Well, you don't know the half of it. I'm on a spot. They've got it in their silly heads that they're nothing but machines; they admit the motor-cars but not the drivers."

"Very true, sir—" nodded Mr. Littlejohn, but the stranger hurried on.

"Newton, Darwin, Nietzsche, and the rest—inventors of mechanical cosmology! A gang of stupid pirates if you ask me." He paced across the dock. "I admit the old ethic had largely lost its punch, but the church was responsible for that. They kept whittling at the thing and then patching up the cracks. But at least it did make sense, a function and a purpose for this thing called human life: *the development and growth of the immortal soul.*"

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn again.

"And now look what you've got: survival of the fit—deification of brute strength. Might is right. Death is the end of life, so glut yourself before they clear the table. A procession to oblivion with greed and fear marching proudly in the van. Look at Russia, at Germany, at Italy—communistic flubdub, fascistic claptrap—*isms—isms—isms:* litters of empty words whelped from a cross-bred bitch—and the soul of man discarded and forgotten. The whole thing is a mess, the worst it's ever been—an awful, stinking mess." He paused for breath.

Mr. Littlejohn was very much intrigued. "Are you a teacher, sir?" he asked.

The stranger scowled. "I am a writer—God save the mark." He flung himself down on the dock and swung his lanky legs above the water. "A literary prostitute in the service of the

cinema." He seemed to grind his teeth. "I have recently composed a luscious piece of tripe for a child named Mirabel."

"Mirabel?"

"The same." He kicked out viciously and one of his slippers fell into the water. "May her dainty little body roast in hell!"

"But—why?" gasped Mr. Littlejohn.

"Sir—" There was menace in his voice. "I am resting from my labors. Let us speak of something else."

"By all means—" Mr. Littlejohn agreed, and then ventured to remark, for the matter was urgent in his thought, "You—er—you mentioned—love——"

"Did I?" The stranger looked up absently and then chuckled to himself. "Well, apropos of love—or rather of the twittering crap for which it is commonly mistaken, I must tell you a story about Kincaid, the producer of colossal super-spectacles." He leaned back comfortably against an end of piling.

"Kincaid built himself a house, and what a house!—one of those pseudo-Spanish things, stupid but expensive. And he wanted for the courtyard, or the patio as they call it, in which there was a fountain—well, he wanted for this focal point of *décor* an important piece of sculpture: something he could point out to visiting potentates and illuminate for parties, and which would symbolize his life, his great success, and, so to speak, epitomize the cinematic art.

"He thought about the thing for months and engaged in many conferences with members of his staff, and they all walked the floor and scratched their heads. But of course, in the end, it boiled down to the inevitable formula: Boy and Girl and Love. There could be nothing else to symbolize Kincaid and his art and his success, and all of them had known this all the time.

"So he cabled to Roumania, to Bullgassian, the sculptor, to drop whatever he was doing and come to Hollywood at once. Bullgassian came. 'My friend,' said Kincaid, the old oil trickling from his tongue, 'you are the greatest sculptor in the world.'

Bullgassian bowed. 'And so,' Kincaid went on, 'I have brought you over here at great expense to sculp for me a sculpture for a fountain for my house, and I want that you should do this in your way with some minor suggestions I will offer. Make any kind of statue that you please so long as it's a Boy and Girl in Love.' Bullgassian bowed; indeed he rarely speaks and his English is appalling. Kincaid lighted a Corona and continued, 'I am a very busy man and I ask you now, my friend, please don't bother me with details. I rely upon your great creative gift; you must design this statue as you see it, but perhaps I can simplify your problem.' He took a turn across his rich, rococo office.

" 'A Boy and Girl in Love, a thing of beauty, chaste and pure, to symbolize my self, my art, and my success. They should be standing up. Yes, yes, I see it now.' He began to get excited. 'The eyes are melting—the tender lips about to meet in Love—the perfect symbol! But—' He paused and shook his finger, 'nothing bawdy, please; no suggestion, not a hint. You understand, my friend?' Bullgassian bowed.

" 'Good,' said Kincaid. 'Then I have nothing further to suggest except that I should like the boy to look like Robert Taylor and the girl like Ginger Rogers. And now, my friend, you are free to exercise your talent in any way you please, and I will not detain you any longer.' Bullgassian bowed and left. And he labored on the opus for forty days and nights, so the story goes, and then he dragged it forth and installed it in the fountain: a very pretty thing, they say, white marble, chaste and pure, a Boy and Girl in Love, with melting eyes and tender lips, and remarkable resemblances to Taylor and to Rogers.

"Kincaid was in a story conference and did not arrive till dusk. He took one look and then he closed his eyes. 'My friend, my friend,' he moaned, 'what have you done?' The figures were nude and with reproductive organs—modestly described but unmistakable. 'I told you, nothing bawdy, no suggestion, not a hint.' The great man wept and tore his hair. It simply wouldn't

do, the symbol of his art and his success involved with this obscenity. How could he face Will Hays or anybody else? He paced around the patio like a madman. 'You do not like thees thing?' inquired Bullgassian in his atrocious accent. Kincaid composed himself with a tremendous effort. 'My friend,' he said, 'it is not a question of what I like or dislike, but of the art I represent, in which certain things are never mentioned. I have here your check—' He held it out—in five figures, so they say—then returned it to his pocket, 'but you will not get one cent until those, er, features of your work—' He gestured toward the zipper in his pants—'have been eliminated.' Bullgassian bowed.

"And he worked all night with his hammer and his chisel, for he hated Hollywood and was anxious to return to his home in Bucharest as quickly as he could. And when the morning dawned not one single hint remained—no suggestion, not a vestige. The statues were in fact as neutral as the Swiss. Kincaid was overjoyed; he could scarce believe his eyes. A Boy and Girl in Love, with melting eyes, and lips about to meet, *but that was all:* a perfect symbol of himself, his art, and his success. 'My friend,' he cried, 'you have done well and I congratulate you. You are an artist like myself; we understand each other.' And he took out the check and gave it to Bullgassian.

"Bullgassian bowed and turned away, but suddenly he paused and squinted at the sculpture with an air of great concern, and then he muttered something in a foreign language. Kincaid was alarmed; he asked if anything was wrong. 'Wrong?' The sculptor sighed. 'Yes, now I see.' 'But what?' And Kincaid squinted too, though he did not see anything amiss. 'Just one leetle thing I have forget, but, if you geeve permission, I can feex. It takes a moment only.' 'Why certainly, my friend—' And Kincaid waved his hand in his most expansive manner. 'Thank you so much,' replied Bullgassian and, gripping his mallet firmly in his fist, he advanced upon the statues and knocked off both their heads. 'There—' he smiled. 'Now I think is more—symbolic.'

And he turned on his heel, bound for Bucharest." The stranger chuckled softly. "Just a story but a good one, don't you think?"

Mr. Littlejohn laughed heartily. "And do such things really happen in Hollywood?" he asked.

"In Hollywood—" He kicked his other slipper off and watched it slowly settle to the bottom. "In Hollywood *anything* can happen. And now, if you please, let us speak of something else."

"We were speaking about—love," Mr. Littlejohn suggested.

"Were we?" He scowled and added rather sulkily, "What about it?"

"Well—" Mr. Littlejohn hesitated doubtfully—"you see, I'm afraid that I don't know what it is——"

"Don't apologize," the man said irritably. "It's a very tricky thing, as little understood as Einstein's relativity. We got it straightened out two thousand years ago but it's all balled up again." He sighed and stared moodily at the water. "Perhaps I might get at it with a parable——"

"A parable!" Mr. Littlejohn exclaimed. "The very thing!"

"Still, I don't know—" The stranger shook his head. "I haven't had much luck with them." He debated with himself. "However I am thinking of a new one—a modern, streamlined parable——"

"Yes, please—" urged Mr. Littlejohn.

"Well, then, here goes: we are in a liquor store——"

"A liquor store?"

"*A liquor store,* I said, and please don't interrupt me. We are in a liquor store lined with shelves all filled with bottles—bottles of every shape and size from a half pint to a magnum—of every color and design—of every texture known to glass, clear as crystal and opaque, thick and thin, soft and hard, tough and brittle. And every bottle in the shop bears a different label, Château this and Château that—and a different vintage date—

and the tinfoil at the neck is never twice the same. Do you follow me at all?"

"Yes," said Mr. Littlejohn.

"Good. Well, we have, as a rule, very definite tastes in glass; we are attracted to this size or shape or color. And we have a taste in labels which responds to names and phrases, and a preference in dates, and an eye for tinfoil too. But with the contents of the bottles we have limited acquaintance. Well, look! the point I wish to make: *we are connoisseurs of tinfoil, not of wine.* Do I make my meaning clear?"

"Quite," said Mr. Littlejohn.

"Good. Hold the picture in your mind: bottles, bottles, bottles, as far as you can see, and nothing else but bottles—sizes, colors, labels in complete and mad confusion, for the liquor store I speak of is the world in which we live, and we are bottles too—just bottles on a shelf. But listen to me now and get this straight: the liquor in the bottles—call it spirit if you like—well, *the liquor in the bottles is the same.*"

"I see—" breathed Mr. Littlejohn.

"The same, always the same, *for there is nothing else.* Some is sweet and some is dry, raw with youth or mellow with the years, heady or mild, bubbling or flat, but—the substance of the stuff is all the same: *juice from the grape of the universal vine.*"

"And—love?" suggested Mr. Littlejohn.

"Love? Well, I have come to that." The stranger smiled. "Love is nothing more nor less than *the vision which can see the contents of the bottle through the glass.*"

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. So that was it at last, and really he had known it all the time.

"Further data on the subject has been written."

"Written?"

"In the Book of Laughter and the Book of Tears." The stranger looked out across the lake and added dryly, "They are published in one volume."

"Yes, I know," smiled Mr. Littlejohn. "I have been reading them. In fact I have used them as guide books on my journey."

"Have you indeed?" The stranger eyed him with a flash of interest, and then suddenly he scowled and his voice was harsh and threatening. "Look here—*why did you ask?*"

"Ask?"

"Yes, *ask*. What's love to you? Or you to love?"

"Oh! Oh, yes!" Mr. Littlejohn was terribly embarrassed. "Well, I—you see—I think perhaps—I am."

"You think you are? Are *what?*"

"In—love," gulped Mr. Littlejohn. He was afraid it would sound silly.

"Oh, you do?"

"I know it sounds presumptuous, but——"

"Humph!" The stranger sneered. "And with *whom* or with *what* are you in love?"

"Why, with Life," Mr. Littlejohn said simply.

The stranger jerked around and stared with feverish, burning eyes. "With Life? Did you say, *Life?*" Mr. Littlejohn nodded; he could scarce sustain the searching gaze which seemed to bore clear through him. And then the man's demeanor changed. He was not sneering now and the smile upon his lips was almost tender. "If what you say be true," he said, "and I suspect it is, why then, sir—you have touched the hand of God."

"Oh, thank you—er—thank you very much—" stammered Mr. Littlejohn.

"And *thank you*," said the man. "You have given me fresh courage of which I stood in need, for it has been a long, sad time since I have found a lamb, and the fold was nearly empty." He looked up smiling at the sky. "There will be rejoicing in my Father's house."

"I beg your pardon—" Mr. Littlejohn was not sure that he had heard correctly.

"My Father—God."

"Oh ——"

"But perhaps you have not fathomed who I am?"

"Well, no—" Mr. Littlejohn admitted. "But in a way of speaking, we are all God's children, I suppose."

The stranger frowned. "I was speaking," he said, "in a purely literal sense."

"Oh—" said Mr. Littlejohn again and could think of nothing else to add.

"I am accustomed to repudiation—" His voice was gently mournful.

"I—I'm really very sorry ——"

"Please don't apologize." There was a long, uncomfortable pause and then he said abruptly, hopefully, "I can walk on the water."

"I—I beg your pardon ——"

"The water, I can walk on it." He waved his arm around the lake. "I have walked all over there—over every inch of it." Mr. Littlejohn said nothing. "You don't believe me?"

"Well—I ——"

"I see—" The man sighed deeply and stood up. "Come," he said, and motioning Mr. Littlejohn to follow him, he drew the skiff against the dock. "Get in!"

"But ——"

"*Get in!*" Mr. Littlejohn got in and the stranger sat down in the stern. "Now row."

"Row?"

"Yes, *row.*" Mr. Littlejohn shipped the oars and rowed, but he had not rowed a boat for many years and presently he failed to dip the blades and, pulling at the air with all his might, toppled off the seat upon his back. "Harvard, I presume," the stranger said.

"No, Yale," corrected Mr. Littlejohn and rowed on hastily. The sun was warm; beads of perspiration trickled down his face, partly due to the physical exertion but even more to his embarrassment. There was silence save for the ripple of the

water and the clicking of the oarlocks. He was getting the hang of it again . . .

"Stop!" Mr. Littlejohn stopped and looked around. They were quite in the middle of the lake which appeared to be deep and not particularly solid. "Thank you, this will do." The stranger rose and the boat rocked dangerously. Mr. Littlejohn was very ill at ease; he felt some way that the thing was a mistake.

"Do—do you really think you should?" he ventured doubtfully. The man regarded him with a reproachful smile. "I mean—well, wouldn't it do just as well—where the water is more shallow?"

"O ye of little faith," the stranger said and stepped across the gunwale. There was a splendid splash; the skiff bobbed like a cork, and, by the time Mr. Littlejohn had cleared his eyes of spray, the Messiah had vanished in the bosom of the lake.

"Dear me—" He had been prepared for failure but not for such complete, abrupt finality. The stranger broke the surface at some distance from the boat, made a gurgling sound, and disappeared again. "Great heavens—" Mr. Littlejohn sculled hastily toward the bubbles and peered down into the depths. Yes, he was coming up, his bathrobe flapping gently like Messianic wings. His head broke through and, reaching to his utmost, Mr. Littlejohn was able to grab him by the hair. "My dear sir—don't be alarmed—one moment now—" He hauled the man into the boat which came near to capsizing. "I'm dreadfully sorry, but—well, you see, I was afraid it wouldn't work." The stranger sat down in the stern. He coughed and spat but did not speak.

"I, er, feel sure—" stammered Mr. Littlejohn. "Well, let us say, under other circumstances—" He could not complete the sentence nor meet the Messianic eye. There was an awkward pause. The stranger sneezed. "I hope you are not catching cold—" No answer. "Perhaps if you would care to take an

oar—" The man rose glumly from his place and sat down by Mr. Littlejohn. And in silence they set out for the shore.

There was, Mr. Littlejohn reflected, simply nothing to be said. To commiserate a virtuoso's failure was to add to his distress. He sighed. Messiahs were always getting into holes like that—confusing the freedom of reality with the rigid limitations of illusion. The soul might defy the law of gravitation but the shell in which it dwelt was bound to sink. You could walk on the water as freely as you chose but sanity prescribed that you leave the human engine in a bath chair on the beach.

The skiff nosed gently to the dock and the stranger sprang out nimbly and stood waiting, oar in hand. Mr. Littlejohn prepared to follow when he was suddenly aware of the expression on his companion's face—an expression so malevolent that he paused in horror.

"Satan—" screamed the man—"you tempted me." And he raised the oar and smote Mr. Littlejohn smartly on the head.

There was another splendid splash but Mr. Littlejohn was blissfully ignorant of it. The human engine slowly sank and lay upon its back on the smooth and sandy bottom in about three feet of water. Pickles, wakened from his nap, charged upon the foe and bit him in the leg.

"Hell spawn! Devil dog!" The Messiah howled with pain, slammed Pickles with the oar and chased him yelping up the bank.

The bubbles ceased; the ripples died away; the frightened minnows ventured back. The human engine was at rest. But the black mustache was acting strangely. Its viscosity in fact was not suited to the element in which it found itself, and it was coming loose. It angled rakishly, became grotesque, then slipped its final mooring and was gone. The stranger returned and looked down into the water.

"Satan—" he mumbled to himself, and then he started violently. "*What?*" He stared and his smoldering eyes were moist

with tears. And now he looked up at the sky and spread his arms like wings. "*A miracle!*" he cried. "Father, I thank thee." And he leaped into the lake, grabbed the human engine by the collar, and dragged it toward the shore.

And at this moment two young men in intern's coats came running through the shrubbery.

"There he is," one shouted. They hurried down the bank in time to meet the stranger emerging from the water.

"Oh, God," the other groaned, "what the hell have you done now?"

"A miracle," the stranger answered sternly and would add nothing more, but he helped them carry Mr. Littlejohn along a path beside the wall and through an iron gate into the pleasant grounds of the asylum.

It was still very early in the morning.

XVI

THE SUPERINTENDENT OF THE asylum was an eminent psychiatrist named Knittwitz—Dr. Herman Knittwitz. His specialty was diagnosis and his method was intuitive. He would regard a patient steadily for some moments and then comment briefly: "schizophrenic" —"manic-depressive"—"paranoiac"—or whatever it was that came into his head. From this point on he lost interest in the matter. He considered insanity pandemic and looked forward to the day when a normally functioning mind would be clinically regarded as morbidly eccentric. Like most psychiatrists he was a little mad, but somewhat in the fashion of a fox.

When Dr. Knittwitz arrived at the infirmary Mr. Littlejohn had been already drained of several quarts of water which had short-circuited his ignition system and threatened for a time to stop the motor. However the human engine was now running nicely: the motor chugged, the R.P.M. was normal, and exhaust from the manifold was regular and smooth. But Mr. Littlejohn himself was fast asleep.

The doctor looked at him closely but refrained from diagnosis. There was something in the patient's face that awoke a vagrant memory. He sent the nurse away and went through the pockets of the duck coat: pajamas, toilet articles, a corncob pipe, a mouth organ. He turned the pockets inside out and found what he had hoped for: a printed linen label, "Crotch—Tailor—681 Fifth Ave." There was something else inked in but it was badly faded. He dispatched an orderly for a magni-

fying glass, and read: "Horatio Littlejohn—August, 1929." He removed the label with his penknife and put it in his pocket, and, without a word to anyone, went straight to his office and consulted a scrapbook in which he was accustomed to preserve news clippings of events with psychopathic implications.

Having read through several pages and made some memoranda, he ordered Mr. Littlejohn removed from the infirmary to a small guest cottage ordinarily reserved for visiting politicians, and friends and relatives of more important patients. He attended the removal which was accomplished without incident, and selected a nurse—a young and particularly stupid one, and bid her attend upon the patient.

Then he went back to his office and put in a phone call to Mr. Harrison Hemlock of Hemlock, Hemlock & Hemlock, at the office of the firm in Wall Street in New York. There was some delay as Mr. Hemlock was in conference but he presently responded. Dr. Knittwitz introduced himself and asked if he were correct in the assumption that there was a reward for the recovery of Horatio Littlejohn.

"Certainly not," Hemlock said emphatically.

"In that case," said Knittwitz, "I am sorry to have troubled you." And he made as if to terminate the matter.

"Wait a moment," Hemlock snapped. "What is this all about?"

"Why, you see," purred Knittwitz, "I have Horatio Littlejohn at present in my guest house, and so I thought—" he paused.

Hemlock laughed. "My dear sir," he said, "Littlejohn has been found in every state in the Union and in several foreign countries, and there is scarcely a day that I am not invited to undertake another wild goose chase, so you can readily understand why I am skeptical."

"Quite," said Knittwitz, and added, "Well, thank you very much ——"

"Does this person claim that he is Littlejohn?"

"Not at all; he is asleep." And the doctor gave such account of the matter as he could, referring briefly to the part played by a well-known scenario writer who had recently gone mad. He mentioned the resemblance to the pictures in his scrapbook and reserved until the last a description of the label he had snipped out of the duck coat. "And so," he concluded with an air of great detachment, "I thought that it might be of interest to the family to avoid the—er—publicity——"

"What's that?" barked Hemlock. "I can't hear." This was a lie; he had not missed a word.

"*Publicity*," repeated Dr. Knittwitz. "I must of course communicate at once with the authorities."

"Yes, of course," said Hemlock and was silent for some moments. He was not paying for the toll and could afford to take his time. "Doctor, I am very much impressed by what you tell me." Knittwitz took this cue to hedge; he might be mistaken like anybody else. "Yes, I know." Hemlock laughed again. "And I suspect you are. After all the coat proves nothing, and the garment you refer to, made in 1929, may have covered many backs." The doctor murmured his agreement. "Still, perhaps I should come out there." There was no answer. "Hello! Hello!"

"Yes—" said Knittwitz.

"I say, I think perhaps I should come out there." But the doctor was now completely noncommittal. "Do you think it might be a good idea if I brought Dr. Schwartzkopf, Mr. Littlejohn's physician?" Knittwitz was in his element; he would not venture an opinion. "Yes—well—" Hemlock was baffled. "We could catch a plane this morning and arrive tonight, I think?"

"I wouldn't know," said Knittwitz.

"I presume you can defer any action which might result in—er—publicity?" Knittwitz assented doubtfully. "Good! Fine! I shall look forward to making your acquaintance. Thank you so much for calling——"

"Good by—" The doctor hung up the receiver and permitted himself the indulgence of a smile.

Mr. Littlejohn slept soundly for ten hours and awoke at 6:00 P.M. He remembered matters slowly: the stranger's face, and Pickles' bark—the last sound he had heard. He inquired for his dog.

"Just fine," cooed the nurse. She had not seen a dog or heard one mentioned.

"Where am I?"

"You are in a comfy bed." She leaned over the pillow in convenient position to be throttled.

"Yes, but——"

"Naughty, naughty!" She shook her finger coyly. "You're not supposed to talk or ask me any questions."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. He tried to think of her as a bottle on a shelf but the glass was hard to penetrate—indeed it was so thick that it seemed solid.

"What would you like for supper?"

"Well, let me see—" He was ravenously hungry. "I would like a hamburger—with onions."

"Hamburger?" she chirped with much amusement, and went off to the pantry where she ordered a cup of chicken broth, one slice of Melba toast, and a pot of watery tea; she was thoroughly accustomed to the whimseys of the mad.

Mr. Littlejohn sat up and looked around. He must be in a hospital, he thought, but a most unusual one. There were flowers in a vase upon the dresser, his clothes were hanging on a costumer, his toilet articles set out on a shelf above the washstand, and on the table by the bed a radio and sundry items from his pockets. Exploring with his fingers he found a good sized lump upon his head. It was tender to the touch, but on the whole he could not remember that he had ever felt so well.

The nurse returned and put the tray down on the bed. Mr.

Littlejohn gazed at it mournfully and ventured to remark that he had ordered hamburger with onions.

"Aren't you a case?" She wagged her finger playfully, and then she went to call on Dr. Knittwitz who was at dinner in his residence a hundred yards away. She reported that the patient was awake and seemed amenable and rational. Knittwitz smiled; he had his own opinions on this subject. He dismissed her with instructions to continue on the case but to stay outside the room and leave the patient to himself unless she should be called.

Mr. Littlejohn ate his soup and toast which barely filled the wrinkles in his stomach, and then turned on the radio and dialed the news, and three seconds later nearly fell out of his bed.

Black Beard was dead—of acute indigestion, in Washington, D. C. He had died in a hotel where, from the window of his room, he could almost look into J. Edgar Hoover's office. There was no mistake about it. He had even left a will which disposed of his estate to sundry charitable institutions. And all the U. S. Treasury gold certificates, stolen from the bank in San Diego, had been recovered. Not a single one was missing.

Mr. Littlejohn leaned back upon his pillow and the tears rolled down his cheeks. Black Beard was dead. It was as if a pillar of his universe had fallen. The radio went on:

As for the yellow bills which had turned up in Winslow and Las Vegas, this was just another mystery which now might not be solved. The outlaw gang which conducted the raid upon the Palace, had been accounted for in full: two of the bandits were in jail, and the third, a Mexican called Tony but now identified as a member of the prominent Cortez family, was dead—killed in a gun battle with G men and special deputies. His remains would be returned to Mexico.

Mr. Littlejohn gulped some tea tinctured with his tears. The radio went on:

As for the stranger with the black mustache, it was now

thought that he was an innocent bystander abducted by the bandits in their effort to escape. This man had passed certain yellow bills and had scattered certain others on the highway, but these bills, it now appeared, had not been stolen, so of what was he accused? J. Edgar Hoover, interrogated on this question by the press as he stepped aboard a plane, had replied with some impatience: "Is it a crime to wear a black mustache?" It might therefore be assumed that the stranger was no longer being looked for . . .

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn and turned off the radio. So he was no longer a fugitive from jutice. The tempo and mutations of contemporary life . . . He sighed. You just got nicely settled in a role and then the play would fail, or the management would change the bill. And they did it without notice. Tonight you played Macbeth, and tomorrow—who could tell? But of one thing you were sure: the theater would be open, the curtain would go up, and you would have a part. He dozed and woke. If something disappeared, there was always something else. He dozed again and dreamed:

He was in a shooting gallery and the targets were bottles on a shelf—bottles of every shape and size, every color and design, every texture known to glass. There were rows and rows and rows of them as far as he could see.

And the customers were bottles too, armed with automatic rifles. The noise was simply deafening—the exploding of the guns and the crashing of the glass. Bottle after bottle splintered and collapsed, and the wine poured out like blood upon the shelf, trickling to the edge and dripping down into the depths . . . He craned his neck but could not see where it was going. It was really very horrible. And then he noticed something else: the shattered bottles on the shelf were replaced by those that shot—the shooters in turn became the targets.

This endless process of destruction was more than he could bear and he was about to utter an objection when suddenly a gun was thrust into his hands and an unseen voice commanded

him to shoot. He felt he must obey and selected for his target a pretty little flask with a cap of colored tinfoil. But he sighted with intentional carelessness and was much relieved to find that he had missed. "Aim at the heart," the voice said sternly. He aimed but now his hands were trembling and so he missed again. "Thank you very much," he said, putting down the gun. "As you please," replied the voice and added coldly, "Take your place upon the shelf." He was terrified at this and begged to be allowed to go away. "Away?" The voice laughed scornfully. "There is no '*away*.' You have either to shoot or to be shot."

And the next thing he knew, he was standing on the shelf close beside the little flask. He wanted to cry out, to warn her of her danger, but he could not hear his voice above the guns and breaking glass. He tried to move, to shield her with his thick and clumsy bulk, but his feet were anchored fast and he could only wait in helpless horror for the end.

It came. The dainty little figure was shattered into fragments and splinters filled the air. The wine poured out across the shelf and down—down—down into the depths. And as it lapped against his frozen feet, he thought he heard a voice inside his ear: "*No wine is ever lost.*"

And then a bullet grazed his neck; a second ripped his thigh. He tottered; he was bleeding but still standing. And now, right at his heart—he could see the bullet coming—very straight, not very fast. There was time to think about it. Crash! It was all over. He was broken . . . But it was not painful as he had expected—quite the contrary in fact. And—he was not dead at all, but running on the shelf, trickling to the edge, and dripping down . . . The glass was gone, the shell dissolved, but *he* was there—alive—aware—and free. There were voices all around him, speaking to him softly in the darkness. "No wine is ever lost. You have come back. You have come home." Down —down—down—into a deep, warm river . . .

He woke. It was near midnight. The teapot had tipped over

and the tea soaked through the bed, which explained the dream—or did it? He put the tray aside and rearranged his bed. Casual factors might explain the inception of a dream, but, once started on its way, it was free to choose its path, twisting in and out through that vague and shifting fringe which divided illusion from reality. And it spoke to you in symbols since there was no other way.

Bottles smashing bottles and becoming, in their turn, trembling targets on a shelf. *Greed and fear.* Shadows shooting shadows, creating the illusion of chaos and destruction, completely unaware of the stuff behind the glass. But no drop of the wine was ever lost. Back it went whence it had come, into the sea of Life, of Consciousness—the great Creative Source—the one Reality.

So it went and so it must go on until men understood the unity of Life, the function and purpose of existence—until, with sharpened vision, they should learn to see the contents of the bottles through the glass. Yes, the meaning of the dream was clear enough.

He was very wide awake and he wondered if he dared to play his mouth organ. Perhaps if he played softly it would not disturb the other inmates. He began with the "Rhapsody" and was in a very tricky part, intent upon the rhythm of the piece and bouncing briskly, when the door was opened quietly and Hemlock and Schwartzkopf walked into the room with Knittwitz close behind them.

They stopped and stared with sagging jaws, but Knittwitz smiled; he had expected something of this sort. Mr. Littlejohn saw them from the corner of his eye and skipped a dozen bars, but got oriented somehow and went on. He needed time to think.

Hemlock and Schwartzkopf here! And now what should he do? The clicking of the treadmill seemed to echo in his head. No, no. There could be no turning back. He must stick to his incognito and brazen out the thing; at least it could do no

harm to try. And in blissful ignorance of the fact that he had lost his mustache and was now completely naked of disguise, he concluded his performance with a flourish, and then looked up and smiled as one who smiles on strangers.

"Good evening, gentlemen ——"

"Good evening, er—" gulped Hemlock.

"*Blackjohn* is the name," Mr. Littlejohn said firmly. "Humphrey Blackjohn."

"Oh—" said Hemlock and exchanged a glance with Schwartzkopf.

"And you, sir, are a doctor, I presume?"

"Why, er, no—" stammered Hemlock. "My name is Hemlock, and, er—this is Dr. Schwartzkopf." Schwartzkopf nodded briefly. He was unpacking his blood-pressure machine.

"Indeed?" Mr. Littlejohn experienced a thrill of satisfaction; he felt that they were baffled, and so in fact they were, but not in the manner that he thought. "Your hospital, Dr. Swartz—" He purposely miscalled the name, "—is very comfortable." Schwartzkopf merely grunted. He stuck a thermometer under the patient's tongue and fixed the rubber bandage on his arm. "And the other gentleman?" Knittwitz introduced himself but remained discreetly in the background. "I am in perfect health except for a slight bump ——"

"Please do not speak," said Schwartzkopf. He stared at the dial of the blood-pressure machine and could not believe his eyes. The instrument recorded one hundred twenty-eight. He pumped it up again and got the same result. And then he took it off and put it in his bag, reflecting that the journey in the air had unbalanced the adjustments.

"High?" breathed Hemlock.

"Very," whispered Schwartzkopf. "The machine is out of order, but to judge from his appearance—" He squinted at the patient's sunburned face—"I should say about two-forty." Hemlock shook his head. The doctor recovered his thermometer, held it to the light and read: ninety-eight point six.

He felt a little faint and hastily sat down. Could this be Littlejohn? The pathological picture was completely out of focus. His head began to buzz. Fortunately he had come prepared with amyl nitrite ampoules, and he crushed one in his handkerchief and held it to his nose. His own blood pressure was extremely high and he had been warned against excitement.

"Are you unwell, Dr. Swartz?" inquired Mr. Littlejohn with a twinkle in his eye which he could not quite suppress.

"Thank you, it is nothing," muttered Schwartzkopf, but he made a mental note to remember this experience and include compensation in his bill.

"I think perhaps—" Hemlock moved uncomfortably and looked at Knittwitz who opened a connecting door into another room which had been placed at the disposal of the visitors.

"Must you hurry, gentlemen?" Mr. Littlejohn was becoming cocky, and the inevitable fall was just a step ahead.

"Why, er—" Hemlock backed away. "We will not disturb you further, Mr. Blackjohn."

"Disturb me?" Mr. Littlejohn laughed lightly. "On the contrary, sir—" He reached to stroke the black mustache, a gesture clearly prompted by a spirit of bravado. Great Heavens! His frantic fingers searched his lip, his chin, his cheeks, his ears. His face turned pale.

"What's the matter?" Hemlock was alarmed. Schwartzkopf stood up. Even Knittwitz was intrigued and came closer to the bed.

"My—my—mustache ——"

"Your *what*?"

"My black mustache," wailed Mr. Littlejohn. His confusion was so dreadful to observe that Hemlock turned away his face. "My mustache—my mustache—" He looked on the floor and underneath the pillow. "I had it on this morning ——"

"Gentlemen, please—" Knittwitz stepped into the breach and motioned the visitors to the door. "You had better leave this thing to me."

"Yes, yes—" groaned Hemlock. "It is terrible." And he fled from the room with Schwartzkopf at his heels.

"And now, Mr. Blackjohn—" Knittwitz took a capsule from his pocket—"you will feel more composed when you have slept."

"Slept? But I have slept all day." The doctor poked the capsule in his mouth and turned his back to get a glass of water. Mr. Littlejohn quickly spit it out and concealed it in his hand. "I do not want to sleep. I want my mustache."

"Now swallow, please—" The glass was set against his lips.

"I want—" He choked—"my mustache."

"You shall have it in the morning."

"No, no, I want it *now*."

"In the morning," said Knittwitz with finality, and he turned out the light and left the room.

Mr. Littlejohn reclined upon his pillow. His mustache! They had taken it away while he was helpless and unconscious—a most unfair advantage, an indignity in fact. And there he was pretending he was Blackjohn when of course they had known him all the time. And no doubt they were laughing at their joke. He listened and, though he heard no laughter, he could plainly hear their voices.

Knittwitz said: "Do not be concerned. The slightest excitement is likely to produce symptoms of this kind."

"Horrible!" said Hemlock, and it sounded as though he were pacing up and down. Knittwitz went on:

"I have given him a powerful hypnotic. He will go to sleep at once and will sleep for several hours."

"You would say that he was thoroughly unbalanced?" This from Schwartzkopf. Mr. Littlejohn was startled and sat up in his bed.

"I would," said Knittwitz dryly, and he would have said the same of Hemlock or of Schwartzkopf. To the mad all things are mad.

Hemlock asked a question: "How would you classify his aberration, doctor?"

"Dementia praecox," Knittwitz said without a moment's hesitation.

"But I thought—" Schwartzkopf speaking—"that was a disease of adolescence."

"You thought correctly, doctor," Knittwitz answered sharply. "The man has been mad for forty years."

"Good God!" groaned Hemlock and stamped about the room. Mr. Littlejohn clung tightly to the covers; he was perspiring freely.

"And the prognosis?" questioned Schwartzkopf.

"Bad," said Knittwitz, and added as an afterthought, "very bad indeed."

"You mean—" Hemlock hesitated. "Let me get the matter clear: you mean that he will continue to be mad?"

"Yes, sir, I do." Knittwitz spoke calmly with an air of great authority. "He will never be less mad than he is now at this moment."

"Good God!" Hemlock said again, and apparently overturned a chair.

There was a pause. Mr. Littlejohn was trembling with excitement. He saw the whole thing clearly: they had humored his behavior in the thought that he was mad. Well, Knittwitz was a fool. They were all fools in fact. It was really too ridiculous. And there was no alternative but to clear the matter up. He must go into that room and resume his own identity. It was too bad, but—there was nothing else to do. He started to get up; indeed he had his legs over the edge, when Hemlock's voice boomed out again.

"Dr. Knittwitz, I will be frank with you. Horatio Littlejohn is conceded to be dead—by his family to whom, in strictest confidence, he was not a brilliant asset—by that great corporation whose affairs he directed very badly, disregarding the advice of his counsel and his friends—by the law, by the press,

and by the public." A pregnant pause. "I will speak for a moment of the family: Mrs. Littlejohn is well, in better health and spirits, so Dr. Schwartzkopf tells me, than she has been in years."

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn. Hemlock went on.

"The daughter, Miss Julia Littlejohn, is now in London where —and again I speak in strictest confidence—announcement of her alliance with a titled English family is momentarily expected. The son, Thomas Littlejohn, whose character bears a marked resemblance to that of his distinguished grandfather, the Commodore, is now at the head of Rosydent where, under guidance of his counsel and associates, he is making an extraordinary record. I may say, again in confidence, that the company's affairs have not, in many years, been so flourishing or promising." He paused.

Mr. Littlejohn tucked his feet under the covers.

"Some other matters I will mention briefly though they are not unimportant: certain differences existing between the deceased—that is to say, er, Littlejohn, and the Treasury Department, have been adjusted; the effect of the dead man's antagonistic attitude toward administration policies, has been, with patient effort, overcome; his confused and fumbling labor altercations have been smoothed and swept away by firmer hands. In short, the picture that I sketch for you is one of peace and plenty." A pause. "You say to me that this man has been mad for forty years. I have no doubt of it. It explains to me a multitude of things which have hitherto been shrouded in impenetrable mystery." Another pause and he paced across the floor.

"Dr. Knittwitz, I will be entirely frank: the resurrection of Horatio Littlejohn, whether mad or sane, would be nothing short of a calamity—a calamity, sir, almost national in its scope." And it sounded as though he flung himself down in a chair.

"Hum—" said Mr. Littlejohn again and got completely back into his bed.

After several moments Knittwitz spoke. He could, he said with calculating hesitation, appreciate the seriousness of the situation and he was anxious to co-operate if for no other reason than the public good. He thought that some arrangement might be made, temporarily at least, permanently perhaps. He, himself, was not concerned with questions of identity and required no knowledge of a patient beyond that he was mad, on which point, in this case, there was no doubt.

"Yes, yes," said Hemlock eagerly.

Knittwitz went on. It was singularly fortunate that, as part of his emolument, he was permitted to receive in the asylum, a limited number of personal, private patients. The present circumstances were, to put it mildly, most unusual—a little irregular perhaps, and—well, his fees might be considered rather high . . . He cleared his throat suggestively.

"Dr. Knittwitz, say no more." Hemlock leaped out of his chair. "You have taken a great load off my heart and volunteered a service of incalculable value to the public. We can defer the details until morning, but I assure you, sir, we shall have no disposition to split hairs."

There was a brief exchange of compliments in which Schwartzkopf joined, and then the closing of a door. Judging from the sounds the visitors were preparing to retire.

Hemlock said reflectively: "Funny thing—of course I knew that it was Littlejohn the moment that I saw him, and yet—" He paused.

"I know—" said Schwartzkopf slowly. "I felt the same thing, Hemlock." He sighed and dropped a shoe. "I suppose his mental state has altered the expression of his face."

"Yes," said Hemlock doubtfully, "I suppose so."

There was silence.

Mr. Littlejohn sat huddled in his bed. The indictment had been uncomfortably severe and—no doubt justified. It was difficult to tell, but other things were obvious: they were sorry they had found him; nobody wanted him—not his wife nor his

daughter nor his son. His associates and his counsel were relieved by his departure; stockholders and employees breathed more freely in his absence; the Treasury and the Senate were glad that he was gone. Peace and plenty had succeeded his demise and the public weal had blossomed on his grave. Well, there it was. A tear rolled down his nose. And then he heard the gentle, friendly voice:

"These matters all pertain to the nature and quality of glass."

"Why, so they do," Mr. Littlejohn agreed, and with a smile dismissed them from his mind and gave his attention to the present situation.

He had been pronounced insane by competent authority and was now confined in an asylum where it might be very pleasant to remain. The surroundings were inviting, and perhaps he could look forward to further conversations with his new friend, the Messiah. He waited patiently for the guidance of the voice.

"Life goes on," it said.

"Why, so it does," he nodded, "and I had best go with it."

The moon had risen. He got up from his bed and dressed and carefully packed the pockets of the duck coat. Then he listened at the door: the visitors were snoring. He turned the knob, tiptoed in, found a pair of trousers on a chair and took from the pocket a good-sized roll of bills which he did not stop to count. He tiptoed back, turned on the light above the desk, reflected for some time, and then he wrote:

My dear Hemlock:

I am not mad but particularly sane.

I am engaged in an important piece of research, in a field which has been signally neglected. "The Littlejohn Expedition to Examine the Enigma" is the title I have given to my project whose purpose has been to ascertain a satisfactory answer to the enigma of my life and of human life in general. And you will be, I feel sure, both surprised and pleased to learn that the answer is in sight—the final fragment of the jigsaw puzzle found.

To give you just a hint: I have discovered, among many other things, that if life is not fun, it is something less than nothing. And if it be not fun to you, or to any other man, it is because he cannot see the contents of the bottle through the glass. For tragedy and comedy, the bitter and the sweet, are in substance really one.

Please say to my family that I am well and happy, and that perhaps some day when my research is complete—or rather, when I am more secure in practice—I may return, but only as a visitor—as one who passes by.

Sincerely
Horatio Littlejohn

He read it carefully and was about to enclose it in an envelope when he bethought himself to add the following postscript:

P.S. I have taken the liberty of borrowing some money from your pocket since I am entirely out of funds, and while my needs are modest, they are none the less imperative. From time to time I may require small additional sums to provide for my research undertakings—in which case I will write. However, I dare say that my needs will be sustained by a fraction of the cost of my entertainment here.

Please remember me to Schwartzkopf and to Knittwitz.

Humphrey Blackjohn

The alteration in the signature was intentional. He sealed the note and tucked it underneath the door.

And then for the first time he glimpsed his reflection in the mirror which hung above the washstand, and started back in consternation. He did not know this man—not Littlejohn, nor Blackjohn, nor anyone that he had ever seen. Good heavens! Had he forgotten what he looked like?—or had he changed so much? He stared, incredulous but pleased. There was something rather nice about his face—warm and friendly, and—yes, strong. Littlejohn and Blackjohn, both were gone, but—it was as if he had a new acquaintance.

The first gray streak of dawn was in the sky when he stepped through the window to the ground and hurried through the shrubbery to the wall. He scaled it easily. There was the lake,

the dock, and there . . . His heart leaped in his breast. His dog! He ran.

But the dog drew back, and growled and showed his teeth.

"Pickles, my friend," he cried, "I have not got my mustache, but—I am I."

And then there was such a yelp of joy and Pickles came running to his hand, every fiber of his being wagging with delight.

"My friend—my friend—" He stroked the woolly head. "The tempo and mutations of contemporary life do not affect your loyalty. You have waited for me here all the day and all the night. I thank you."

Pickles sniffed his pocket.

"You are hungry? Yes, I know, and so am I."

Pickles barked and wriggled.

"But come, let us be off! The highway is before us. There are hamburgers ahead."

They followed the path around the lake and came into the highway.

Life was singing—racing—all around them.

FINIS

SET IN LINOTYPE JANSON TYPE
FORMAT BY A. W. RUSHMORE. SET,
PRINTED AND BOUND BY HADDON
CRAFTSMEN. PUBLISHED BY HARPER
& BROTHERS, NEW YORK AND LON-
DON. MCMXL